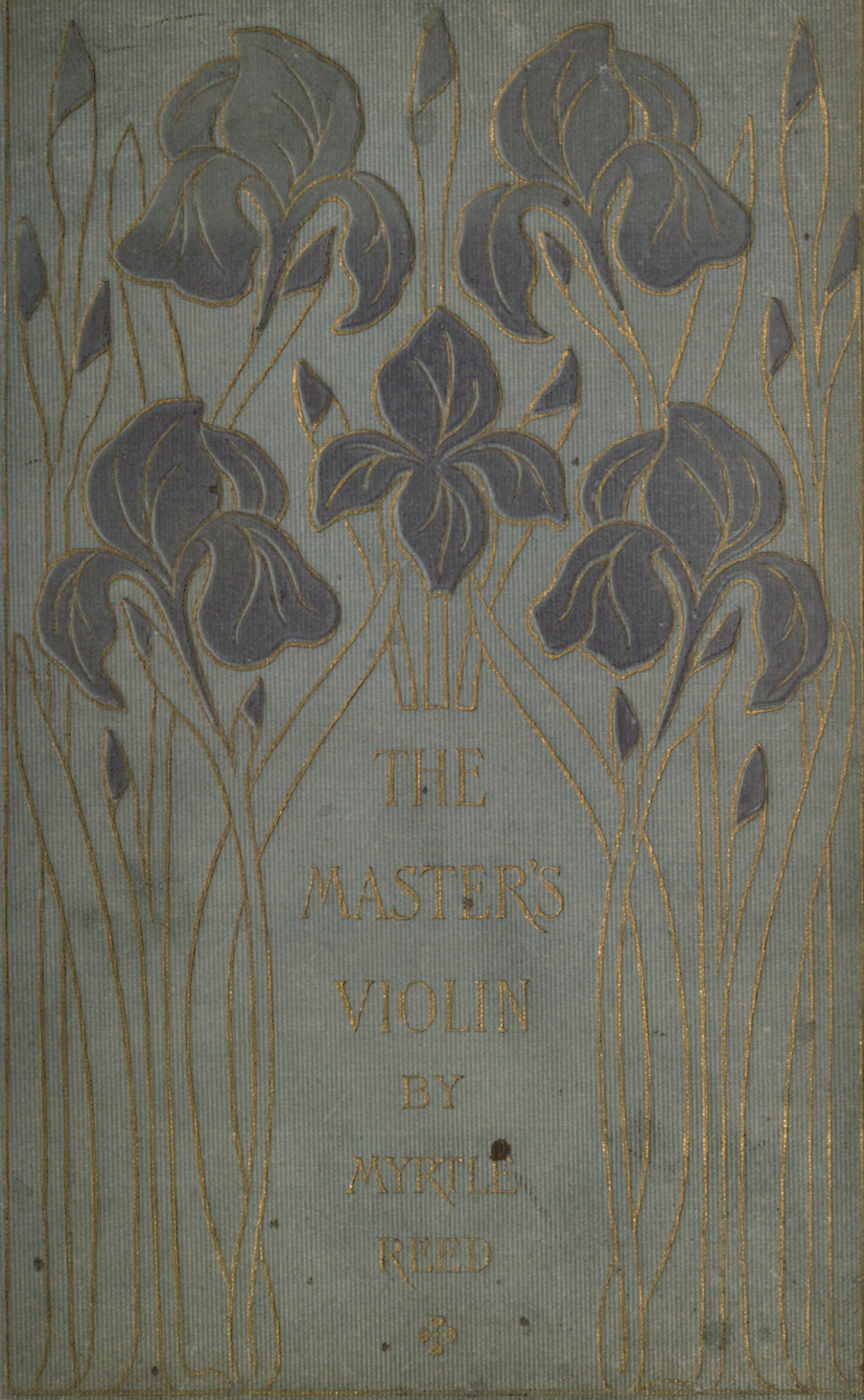
THE
MASTER'S
VIOLIN
BY
MYRTLE
REED

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By MYRTLE REED

LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN
LATER LOVE LETTERS OF A MUSICIAN
THE SPINSTER BOOK
LAVENDER AND OLD LACE
PICKABACK SONGS
THE SHADOW OF VICTORY
THE MASTER'S VIOLIN
THE BOOK OF CLEVER BEASTS
AT THE SIGN OF THE JACK O' LANTERN
A SPINNER IN THE SUN

THE MASTER'S VIOLIN

By MYRTLE REED

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1906

Copyright, 1904
by
MYRTLE REED

Published, September, 1904
Reprinted, October, 1904; November, 1904
March, 1904; June, 1905; September, 1905
October, 1905; January, 1906; June, 1906;
September, 1906

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

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The Master's Violin

I

The Master Plays

THE fire blazed newly from its embers and set strange shadows to dancing upon the polished floor. Now and then, there was a gleam from some dark mahogany surface and an answering flash from a bit of old silver in the cabinet. April, warm with May's promise, came in through the open window, laden with the wholesome fragrance of growing things, and yet, because an old lady loved it, there was a fire upon the hearth and no other light in the room.

She sat in her easy chair, sheltered from possible draughts, and watched it, seemingly unmindful of her three companions. Tints of amethyst and sapphire appeared in the haze from the backlog and were lost a moment later in the dominant flame. In that last hour of glorious life, the tree was giving back its memories—blue skies, grey days just

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tinged with gold, lost rainbows, and flashes of sun.

Friendly ghosts of times far past were conjured back in shadows — outspread wings, low-lying clouds, and long nights that ended in dawn. Swift flights of birds and wandering craft of thistledown were mirrored for an instant upon the shining floor, and then forgotten, because of falling leaves.

Lines of transfiguring light changed the snowy softness of Miss Field's hair to silver, and gave to her hands the delicacy of carved ivory. A tiny foot peeped out from beneath her gown, clad in its embroidered silk stocking and high-heeled slipper, so brave in its trappings of silver buckles that she might have been eighteen instead of seventy-five.

Upon her face the light lay longest; perhaps with an answering love. The years had been kind to her — had given her only enough bitterness to make her realise the sweetness, and from the threads that Life had placed in her hands at the beginning, had taught her how to weave the blessed fabric of Content.

"Aunt Peace," asked the girl, softly, "have you forgotten that we have company?"

Dispelled by the voice, the gracious phan-

toms of Memory vanished. There was a little silence, then the old lady smiled. "No, dearie," she said, "indeed I have n't. It is too rare a blessing for me to forget."

"Please don't call us 'company,'" put in the other woman, quickly, "because we 're not."

"'Company,'" observed the young man on the opposite side of the hearth, "is extremely good under the circumstances. Somebody nearly breaks down your front door on a rainy afternoon, and when you rush out to save the place from ruin, you discover two dripping tramps on your steps. Stranded on an island in the road is a waggon containing their trunks, from which place of refuge they recently swam to your door. 'How do you do, Aunt Peace?' says mother; 'we 've come to live with you from this time on to the finish.' On behalf of this committee, ladies, I thank you, from my heart, for calling us 'company.'"

Laughing, he rose and made an exaggerated courtesy. "Lynn! Lynn!" expostulated his mother. "Is it possible that after all my explanations you don't understand? Why, I wrote more than two weeks ago, asking her

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to let us know if she did n't want us. Silence always gives consent, and so we came."

"Yes, we came all right," continued the boy, cheerfully, "and, as everybody knows, we 're here now, but is n't it just like a woman? Upon my word, I think they 're queer —the whole tribe."

"Having thus spoken," remarked the girl, "you might tell us how a man would have managed it."

"Very easily. A man would have called in his stenographer—no, he would n't, either, because it was a personal letter. He would have made an excavation into his desk and found the proper stationery, and would have put in a new pen. 'My dear Aunt Peace,' he would have said, 'you must n't think I 've forgotten you because I have n't written for such a long time. If I had written every time I had wanted to, or had thought of you, actually, you 'd have been bored to death with me. I have a kid who thinks he is going to be a fiddler, and we have decided to come and live with you while he finds out, as we understand that Herr Franz Kaufmann, who is not unknown to fame, lives in your village. Will you please let us know? If you can't take

us, or don't want to, here 's a postage stamp, and no hard feelings on either side.' "

"Just what I said," explained Mrs. Irving, "though my language was n't quite like yours."

The old lady smiled again. "My dears," she began, "let us cease this unprofitable discussion. It is all because we are so far out of the beaten track that we seldom go to the post-office. I am sure the letter is there now."

"I will get it to-morrow," replied Lynn, "which is kind of me, considering that my remarks have just been alluded to as 'unprofitable.' "

"You can't expect everybody to think as much of what you say as you do," suggested Iris, with a trace of sarcasm.

"Score one for you, Miss Temple. I shall now retire into my shell." So saying, he turned to the fire, and his face became thoughtful again.

The three women looked at him from widely differing points of view. The girl, concealed in the shadow, took maidenly account of his tall, well-knit figure, his dark eyes, his sensitive mouth, and his firm, finely modelled chin. From a half-defined impulse

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of coquetry, she was glad of the mood which had led her to put on her most becoming gown early in the afternoon. The situation was interesting—there was a vague hint of a challenge of some kind.

Aunt Peace, so long accustomed to quiet ways, had at first felt the two an intrusion into her well-ordered home, though at the same time her hospitable instincts reproached her bitterly. He was of her blood and her line, yet in some way he seemed like an alien suddenly claiming kinship. A span of fifty years and more stretched between them, and across it, they contemplated each other, both wondering. For his part, he regarded her as one might a cameo of fine workmanship or an old miniature. She was so passionless, so virginal, so far removed from all save the gentlest emotions, that he saw her only as one who stood apart.

The smile still lingered upon her lips and the firelight made shadows beneath her serene eyes. Had they asked her for her thoughts she could have phrased only one. Deep down in her heart she wondered whether anything on earth had ever been so joyously young as Lynn.

His mother, too, was watching him, as always when she thought herself unobserved. In spite of his stalwart manhood, to her he was still a child. Forgiving all things, dreaming all things, hoping all things with the boundless faith of maternity, she loved him, through the child that he was, for the man that he might be—loved him, through the man that he was, for the child that he had been.

The fire had died down, and Iris, leaning forward, laid a bit of pine upon the dull glow in the midst of the ashes. It caught quickly, and once again the magical light filled the room.

"Sing something, dear," said Aunt Peace, drowsily, and Iris made a little murmur of dissent.

"Do you sing, Miss Temple?" asked Irving, politely.

"No," she answered, "and what 's more, I know I don't, but Aunt Peace likes to hear me."

"We 'd like to hear you, too," said Mrs. Irving, so gently that no one could have refused.

Much embarrassed, she went to the piano, which stood in the next room, just beyond

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the arch, and struck a few chords. The instrument was old and worn, but still sweet, and, fearful at first, but gaining confidence as she went on, Iris sang an old-fashioned song.

Her voice was contralto; deep, vibrant, and full, but untrained. Still, there were evidences of study and of work along right lines. Before she had finished, Irving was beside her, resting his elbow upon the piano.

"Who taught you?" he asked, when the last note died away.

"Herr Kaufmann," she replied, diffidently.

"I thought he was a violin teacher."

"He is."

"Then how can he teach singing?"

"He does n't."

Irving went no farther, and Miss Temple, realising that she had been rude, hastened to atone. "I mean by that," she explained, "that he does n't teach anyone but me. I had a few lessons a long time ago, from a lady who spent the Summer here, and he has been helping me ever since. That is all. He says it does n't matter whether people have voices or not—if they have hearts, he can make them sing."

"You play, don't you?"

"Yes — a little. I play accompaniments for him sometimes."

"Then you 'll play with me, won't you?"

"Perhaps."

"When — to-morrow?"

"I 'll see," laughed Iris. "You should be a lawyer instead of a violinist. You make me feel as if I were on the witness stand."

"My father was a lawyer; I suppose I inherit it." Iris had a question upon her lips, but checked it.

"He is dead," the young man went on, as though in answer to it. "He died when I was about five years old, and I remember him scarcely at all."

"I don't remember either father or mother," she said. "I had a very unhappy childhood, and things that happened then make me shudder even now. Just at the time it was hardest — when I could n't possibly have borne any more — Aunt Peace discovered me. She adopted me, and I 've been happy ever since, except for all the misery I can't forget."

"She 's not really your aunt, then?"

"No. Legally, I am her daughter, but she would n't want me to call her 'mother,' even if I could."

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The talk in the other room had become merely monosyllables, with bits of understanding silence between. Iris went back, and Mrs. Irving thanked her prettily for the song.

"Thank you for listening," she returned. "Come, Aunt Peace, you 're nodding."

"So I was, dearie. Is it late?"

"It 's almost ten."

In her stately fashion, Miss Field bade her guests good night. Iris lit a candle and followed her up the broad, winding stairway. It made a charming picture — the old lady in her trailing gown, the light throwing her white hair into bold relief, and the girl behind her, smiling back over the banister, and waving her hand in farewell.

In Lynn's fond sight, his mother was very lovely as she sat there, with the firelight shining upon her face. He liked the way her dark hair grew about her low forehead, her fair, smooth skin, and the mysterious depths of her eyes. Ever since he could remember, she had worn a black gown, with soft folds of white at the throat and wrists.

"It 's time to go out for our walk now," he said.

"Not to-night, son. I 'm tired."

"That does n't make any difference ; you must have exercise."

"I 've had some, and besides, it 's wet."

Lynn was already out of hearing, in search of her wraps. He put on her rubbers, paying no heed to her protests, and almost before she knew it, she was out in the April night, woman-like, finding a certain pleasure in his quiet mastery.

The storm was over and the hidden moon silvered the edges of the clouds. Here and there a timid planet looked out from behind its friendly curtain, but only the pole star kept its beacon steadily burning. The air was sweet with the freshness of the rain, and belated drops, falling from the trees, made a faint patter upon the ground.

Down the long elm-bordered path they went, the boy eager to explore the unfamiliar place; the mother, harked back to her girlhood, thrilled with both pleasure and pain.

Happy are they who leave the scenes of early youth to the ministry of Time. Going back, one finds the river a little brook, the long stretch of woodland only a grove in the midst of a clearing, and the upland pastures,

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that once seemed mountains, are naught but stony, barren fields.

As they stood upon the bridge, looking down into the rushing waters, Margaret remembered the lost majesty of that narrow stream, and sighed. The child who had played so often upon its banks had grown to a woman, rich with Life's deepest experiences, but the brook was still the same. Through endless years it must be the same, drawing its waters from unseen sources, while generation after generation withered away, like the flowers that bloomed upon its grassy borders while the years were young.

Lynn broke rudely into her thoughts. "I wish I 'd known you when you were a kid, mother," he said.

"Why?"

"Oh, I think I 'd have liked to play with you. We could have made some jolly mud pies."

"We did, but you were three, and I was twenty-five. Much ashamed, too, I remember, when your father caught me doing it."

"Am I like him?"

He had asked the question many times and her answer was always the same. "Yes,

very much like him. He was a good man, Lynn."

"Do I look like him?"

"Yes, all but your eyes."

"When you lived here, did you know Herr Kaufmann?"

"By sight, yes." He was looking straight at her, but she had turned her face away, forgetting the darkness. "We used to see him passing in the street," she went on, in a different tone. "He was a student and never seemed to know many people. He would not remember me."

"Then there 's no use of my telling him who I am?"

"Not the least."

"Maybe he won't take me."

"Yes, he will," she answered, though her heart suddenly misgave her. "He must — there is no other way."

"Will you go with me?"

"No, indeed; you must go alone. I shall not appear at all."

"Why, mother?"

"Because." It was her woman's reason, which he had learned to accept as final. Beyond that there was no appeal.

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East Lancaster lay on one side of the brook and West Lancaster on the other. The two settlements were quite distinct, though they had a common bond of interest in the post-office, which was harmoniously situated near the border line. East Lancaster was the home of the aristocracy. Here were old Colonial mansions in which, through their descendants, the builders still lived. The set traditions of a bygone century held full sway in the place, but, though circumscribed by conditions, the upper circle proudly considered itself complete.

West Lancaster was on a hill, and a steep one at that. Hardy German immigrants had settled there, much to the disgust of East Lancaster, holding itself sternly aloof year after year. It was not considered "good form" to allude to the dwellers upon the hill, save in low tones and with lifted brows, yet there were not wanting certain good Samaritans who sent warm clothing and discarded playthings, after nightfall and by stealth, to the little Teutons who lived so near them.

Hemmed in by the everlasting hills, estranged from its neighbour, and barely upon speaking terms with other towns, East Lan-

caster let the world go on by. Two trains a day rushed through the station, for the main line of the railroad, receiving no encouragement from East Lancaster, had laid its tracks elsewhere. It was still spoken of as "the time when, if you will remember, my dear, they endeavoured to ruin our property with dirt and noise."

"Her clothes are like her name," remarked Lynn.

"Whose clothes?" asked Mrs. Irving, taken out of her reverie.

"That girl's. She had on a green dress, and some yellow velvet in her hair. Her eyes are purple."

"Violet, you mean, dear. Did you notice that?"

"Of course—don't I notice everything? Come, mother; I'll race you to the top of the hill."

Once again her objections were of no avail. Together they ran, laughing, up the winding road that led to the summit, stopping very soon, however, and going on at a more moderate pace.

The street was narrow, and the houses on either side were close together. Each had its

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tiny patch of ground in front, laid out in flower-beds bordered with whitewashed stones, in true German fashion. There were no street lamps, for West Lancaster also resented all modern innovations, but in the Spring night one could see dimly.

Lanterns flitted here and there, like fireflies starred against the dark. Margaret protested that she was tired, but Lynn put his arm around her and hurried her on. Never before had she set foot upon the soil of West Lancaster, but she had full knowledge of the way.

The brow of the hill was close at hand, and she caught her breath in sudden fear. Lynn, in the midst of a graphic recital of some boyish prank, took no note of her agitation. He did not even know that they had come to the end of their journey, until a man tiptoed toward them, his finger upon his lips.

"Hush!" he breathed. "The Master plays."

At the very top of the hill, almost at the brink of the precipice, was a house so small that it seemed more like a box than a dwelling. In the street were a dozen people, both men and women, standing in stolid patience. The little house was dark, but a

window was open, and from within, muted almost to a whisper, came the voice of a violin.

For an hour or more they stood there, listening. By insensible degrees the music grew in volume, filled with breadth and splendour, yet with a lyric undertone. Sounding chords, caught from distant silences, one by one were woven in. Songs that had an epic grasp; question, prayer, and heartbreak; all the pain and beauty of the world were part of it, and yet there was something more.

To Lynn's trained ear, it was an improvisation by a master hand. He was lost in admiration of the superb technique, the delicate phrasing, and the wonderful quality of the tone. To the woman beside him, shaken from head to foot by unutterable emotion, it was Life itself, bare, exquisitely alive, tuned to the breaking point—a human thing, made of tears and laughter, of ecstasy, tenderness, and black despair, lying on the Master's breast and answering to his touch.

The shallows touch the pebbles, and behold, there is a little song. The deeps are stirred to their foundations, and, long afterward, there is a single vast strophe, majestic

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and immortal, which takes its place by right in the symphony of pain. To Margaret, standing there with her senses swaying, all her possibilities of feeling were merged into one unspeakable hurt.

"Take me away;" she whispered, "I can bear no more!"

But Lynn did not hear. He was simply and solely the musician, his body tense, his head bent forward and a little to one side, nodding in emphasis or approval.

She slipped her arm through his and, trembling, waited as best she might for the end. It came at last and the little group near them took up its separate ways. Someone put down the window and closed the shutters. The Master knew quite well that some of his neighbours had been listening, but it pleased him to ignore the tribute. No one dared to speak to him about his playing.

"Mother! Mother!" said Lynn, tenderly, "I've been selfish, and I've kept you too long!"

"No," she answered, but her lips were cold and her voice was not the same. They went downhill together, and she leaned heavily upon his supporting arm. He was

humming, under his breath, bits of the improvisation, and did not speak again until they were at home.

The fire was out, but Iris had left two lighted candles on a table in the hall. "A fine violin," he said; "by far the finest I have ever heard."

"Yes," she returned, "a Cremona—that is, I think it must be, from its tone."

"Possibly. Good night, and pleasant dreams."

They parted at the head of the stairs, and down on the landing the tall clock chimed twelve. Margaret lay for a long time with her eyes closed, but none the less awake. Toward dawn, the ghostly fingers of her dreams tapped questioningly at the Master's door, but without disturbing his sleep.

II

"Mine Cremona"

"Mine Cremona"

LYNN went up the hill with a long, swinging stride. The morning was in his heart and it seemed good to be alive. His blood fairly sang in his pulses, and his cheery whistle was as natural and unconscious as the call of the robin in the maple thicket beyond.

The German housewives left their work and came out to see him pass, for strangers in West Lancaster were so infrequent as to cause extended comment, and he left behind him a trail of sharp glances and nodding heads. The entire hill was instantly alive with gossip which buzzed back and forth like a hive of liberated bees. It was a sturdy dame near the summit who quelled it, for the time being.

"So," she said to her next-door neighbour, "I was right. He will be going to the Master's."

The word went quickly down the line, and after various speculations regarding his possible errand, the neglected household tasks were taken up and the hill was quiet again, except for the rosy-cheeked children who played stolidly in their bits of dooryards.

Lynn easily recognised the house, though he had seen it but dimly the night before. It was two stories in height, but very small, and, in some occult way, reminded one of a bird-house. It was perched almost upon the ledge, and its western windows overlooked the valley, filled with tossing willow plumes, the winding river, half asleep in its mantle of grey and silver, and the range of blue hills beyond.

It was the only house upon the hill which boasted two front entrances. Through the shining windows of the lower story, on a level with the street, he saw violins in all stages of making, but otherwise, the room was empty. So he climbed the short flight of steps and rang the bell.

The wire was slack and rusty, but after two or three trials a mournful clang came from the depths of the interior. At last the door was opened, cautiously, by a woman

"Mine Cremona"

whose flushed face and red, wrinkled fingers betrayed her recent occupation.

"I beg your pardon," said Irving, making his best bow. "Is Herr Kaufmann at home?"

"Not yet," she replied, "he will have gone for his walk. You will be coming in?"

She asked the question as though she feared an affirmative answer. "If I may, please," he returned, carefully wiping his feet upon the mat. "Do you expect him soon?"

"Yes." She ushered him into the front room and pointed to a chair. "You will please excuse me," she said.

"Certainly! Do not let me detain you."

Left to himself, he looked about the room with amused curiosity. The furnishings were a queer combination of primitive American ideas and modern German fancies, overlaid with a feminine love of superfluous ornament. The Teutonic fondness for colour ran riot in everything, and purples, reds, and yellows were closely intermingled. The exquisite neatness of the place was its redeeming feature.

Apparently, there were two other rooms on the same floor—a combined kitchen and dining-room was just back of the parlour, and

a smaller room opened off of it. Lynn was meditating upon Herr Kaufmann's household arrangements, when a wonderful object upon the table in the corner attracted his attention, and he went over to examine it.

Obviously, it had once been a section of clay drainage pipe, but in its sublimated estate it was far removed from common uses. It had been smeared with putty, and, while plastic, ornamented with hinges, nails, keys, clock wheels, curtain rings, and various other things not usually associated with drainage pipes. When dry, it had been given further distinction by two or three coats of gold paint.

A wire hair-pin, placed conspicuously near the top of it, was rendered so ridiculous by the gilding that Lynn laughed aloud. Then, influenced by the sound of the scrubbing-brush close at hand, he endeavoured to cover it with a cough. He was too late, however, for, almost immediately, his hostess appeared in the doorway.

"Mine crazy jug," she said, with gratified pride beaming from every feature.

"I was just looking at it," responded Lynn. "It is marvellous. Did you make it yourself?"

"Yes, I make him mineself," she said,

"Mine Cremona"

and then retreated, blushing with innocent pleasure.

Not knowing what else to do, he went back to his chair and sat down again, carefully avoiding the purple tidy embroidered with pink roses. Outside, the street was deserted. He wondered what type of a man it was who could live in the same house with a "crazy jug" and play as Herr Kaufmann played, only last night. Then he reflected that the room had been dark, and smiled at his foolish fancy.

A square piano took up one whole side of the room, and there were two violins upon it. Unthinkingly, Lynn investigated. The first one was a good instrument of modern make, and the other—he caught his breath as he took it out of its case. The thin, fine shell was the beautiful body of a Cremona, enshrining a Cremona's still more beautiful soul.

He touched it reverently, though his hands trembled and his face was aglow. He snapped a string with his finger and the violin answered with a deep, resonant tone, but before the sound had died away, there was an exclamation of horror in his ears and a firm grip upon his arm.

"Mine brudder's Cremona!" cried the woman, her eyes flashing lightnings of anger. "You will at once put him down!"

"I beg a thousand pardons! I did not realise—I did not mean—I did not understand——" He went on with confused explanations and apologies which availed him nothing. He stood before her, convicted and shamed, as one who had profaned the household god.

Wiping her hands upon her apron, she went to her work-box, took out her knitting, and sat down between Lynn and the piano. The chair was hard and uncompromising, with an upright back, but she disdained even that support and sat proudly erect.

There was no sound save the click of the needles, and she kept her eyes fixed upon her work. After an awkward silence, Lynn made one or two tentative efforts toward conversation, but each opening proved fruitless, and at length he seriously meditated flight.

The approach to the door was covered, but there were plenty of windows, and it would be an easy drop to the ground. He smiled as he saw himself, mentally, achieving escape in this manner and running all the way home.

"Mine Cremona"

"I wonder," he mused, "where in the dickens 'mine brudder' is!"

The face of the woman before him was still flushed and the movement of the needles betrayed her excitement. He noted that she wore no wedding ring and surmised that she was a little older than his mother. Her features were hard, and her thin, straight hair was brushed tightly back and fastened in a little knot at the back of her head. It was not unlike a door knob, and he began to wonder what would happen if he should turn it.

His irrepressible spirits bubbled over and he coughed violently into his handkerchief, feeling himself closely scrutinised meanwhile. The situation was relieved by the sound of footsteps and the vigorous slam of the lower door.

Still keeping the piano, with its precious burden, within range of her vision, Fräulein Kaufmann moved toward the door. "Franz! Franz!" she called. "Come here!"

"One minute!" The voice was deep and musical and had a certain lyric quality. When he came up, there was a conversation in indignant German which was brief but sufficient.

"I can see," said Lynn to himself, "that I am not to study with Herr Kaufmann."

Just then he came in, gave Lynn a quick, suspicious glance, took up the Cremona, and strode out. He was gone so long that Lynn decided to retreat in good order. He picked up his hat and was half way out of his chair when he heard footsteps and waited.

"Now," said the Master, "you would like to speak with me?"

He was of medium height, had keen, dark eyes, bushy brows, ruddy cheeks, and a mass of grey hair which he occasionally shook back like a mane. He had the typical hands of the violinist.

"Yes," answered Lynn, "I want to study with you."

"Study what?" Herr Kaufmann's tone was somewhat brusque. "Manners?"

"The violin," explained Irving, flushing.

"So? You make violins?"

"No—I want to play,"

"Oh," said the other, looking at him sharply, "it is to play! Well, I can teach you nothing."

He rose, as though to intimate that the interview was at an end, but Lynn was not so

"Mine Cremona"

easily turned aside. "Herr Kaufmann," he began, "I have come hundreds of miles to study with you. We have broken up our home and have come to live in East Lancaster for that one purpose."

"I am flattered," observed the Master, dryly. May I ask how you have heard of me so far away as many hundred miles?"

"Why, everybody knows of you! When I was a little child, I can remember my mother telling me that some day I should study with the great Herr Kaufmann. It is the dream of her life and of mine."

"A bad dream," remarked the violinist, succinctly. "May I ask your mother's name?"

"Mrs. Irving—Margaret Irving."

"Margaret," repeated the old man in a different tone. "Margaret."

There was a long silence, then the boy began once more. "You 'll take me, won't you?"

For an instant the Master seemed on the point of yielding, unconditionally, then he came to himself with a start. "One moment," he said, clearing his throat. "Why did you lift up mine Cremona?"

The piercing eyes were upon him and

Lynn's colour mounted to his temples, but he met the gaze honestly. "I scarcely know why," he answered. "I was here alone, I had been waiting a long time, and it has always been natural for me to look at violins. I think we all do things for which we can give no reason. I certainly had no intention of harming it, nor of offending anybody. I am very sorry."

"Well," sighed the Master, "I should not have left it out. Strangers seldom come here, but I, too, was to blame. Fredrika takes it to herself; she thinks that she should have left her scrubbing and sat with you, but of that I am not so sure. It is mine Cremona," he went on, bitterly, "nobody touches it but mineself."

His distress was very real, and, for the first time, Irving felt a throb of sympathy. However unreasonable it might be, however weak and childish, he saw that he had unwittingly touched a tender place. All the love of the hale old heart was centred upon the violin, wooden, inanimate—but no. Nothing can be inanimate, which is sweetheart and child in one.

"Herr Kaufmann," said Lynn, "believe me,

"Mine Cremona"

if any act of mine could wipe away my touch, I should do it here and now. As it is, I can only ask your pardon."

"We will no longer speak of it," returned the Master, with quiet dignity. "We will attempt to forget."

He went to the window and stood with his back to Irving for a long time. "What could I have done?" thought Lynn. "I only picked it up and laid it down again—I surely did not harm it."

He was too young to see that it was the significance, rather than the touch; that the old man felt as a lover might who saw his beloved in the arms of another. The bloom was gone from the fruit, the fragrance from the rose. For twenty-five years and more, the Cremona had been sacredly kept.

The Master's thoughts had leaped that quarter-century at a single bound. Again he stood in the woods beyond East Lancaster, while the sky was dark with threatening clouds and the dead leaves scurried in fright before the north wind. Beside him stood a girl of twenty, her face white and her sweet mouth quivering.

"You must take it," she was saying. "It

is mine to do with as I please, and no one will ever know. If anyone asks, I can fix it someway. It is part of myself that I give you, so that in all the years, you will not forget me. When you touch it, it will be as though you took my hand in yours. When it sings to you, it will be my voice saying: 'I love you!' And in it you will find all the sweetness of this one short year. All the pain will be blotted out and only the joy will be left—the joy that we can never know!"

Her voice broke in a sob, then the picture faded in a mist of blinding tears. Dull thunders boomed afar, and he felt her lips crushed for an instant against his own. When clear sight came back, the storm was raging, and he was alone.

Irving waited impatiently, for he was restless and longed to get away, but he dared not speak. At last the old man turned away from the window, his face haggard and grey.

"You will take me?" asked Lynn, with a note of pleading in his question.

"Yes," sighed the Master, "I take you. Tuesdays and Fridays at ten. Bring your violin and what music you have. We

"Mine Cremona"

will see what you have done and what you can do. Good-bye."

He did not seem to see Lynn's offered hand, and the boy went out, sorely troubled by something which seemed just outside his comprehension. He walked for an hour in the woods before going home, and in answer to questions merely said that he had been obliged to wait for some time, but that everything was satisfactorily arranged.

"Is n't he an old dear?" asked Iris.

"I don't know," answered Lynn. "Is he?"

III

The Gift of Peace

THE mistress of the mansion was giving her orders for the day. From the farthest nooks and corners of the attic, where fragrant herbs swayed back and forth in ghostly fashion, to the tiled kitchen, where burnished copper saucepans literally shone, Miss Field kept in daily touch with her housekeeping.

The old Colonial house was her pride and her delight. It was by far the oldest in that part of the country, and held an exalted position among its neighbours on that account, though the owner, not having spent her entire life in East Lancaster, was considered somewhat "new." To be truly aristocratic, at least three generations of one's forbears must have lived in the same dwelling.

In the hall hung the old family portraits. Gentlemen and gentlewomen, long since

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gathered to their fathers, had looked down from their gilded frames upon many a strange scene. Baby footsteps had faltered on the stairs, and wide childish eyes had looked up in awe to this stately company. Older children had wondered at the patches and the powdered hair, the velvet knickerbockers and ruffled sleeves. Awkward schoolboys had boasted to their mates that the jewelled sword, which hung at the side of a young officer in the uniform of the Colonies, had been presented by General Washington himself, in recognition of conspicuous bravery upon the field. Lovers had led their sweethearts along the hall at twilight, to whisper that their portraits, too, should some day hang there, side by side. Soldiers of Fortune who had found their leader fickle had taken fresh courage from the set lips of the gallant gentlemen in the great hall. Women whose hearts were breaking had looked up to the painted and powdered dames along the winding stairway, and learned, through some subtle freemasonry of sex, that only the low-born cry out when hurt. Faint, wailing voices of new-born babes had reached the listening ears of the portraits by night and by

day. Coffin after coffin had gone out of the wide door, flower-hidden, and step after step had died away forever, leaving only an echo behind. And yet the men and women of the line of Field looked out from their gilded frames, high-spirited, courageous, and serene, with here and there the hint of a smile.

Far up the stairs and beyond the turn hung the last portrait: Aunt Peace, in the bloom of her mature beauty, painted soon after she had taken possession of the house. The dark hair was parted over the low brow and puffed slightly over the tiny ears. The flowered gown was cut modestly away at the throat, showing a shoulder line that had been famous in three counties when she was the belle of the countryside. For the rest, she was much the same. Let the artist make the brown hair snowy white, change the girlish bloom to the tint of a faded pink rose, draw around the eyes and the mouth a few tiny time-tracks, which, after all, were but the footprints of smiles, sadden the trustful eyes a bit, and cover the frivolous gown with black brocade,—then the mistress of the mansion, who moved so gaily through the house, would inevitably startle you as you came

upon her at the turn of the stairs, having believed, all the time, that she was somewhere else.

At the moment, she was in the garden, with Mrs. Irving and "the children," as she called Iris and Lynn. "Now, my talented nephew-once-removed," she was saying, in her high, sweet voice, "will you kindly take the spade and dig until you can dig no more? I am well aware that it is like hitching Pegasus to the plough, but I have grown tired of waiting for my intermittent gardener, and there is a new theory to the effect that all service is beautiful."

"So it is," laughed Lynn, turning the earth awkwardly. "I know what you 're thinking of, mother, but it is n't going to hurt my hands."

"You shall have a flower-bed for your reward," Aunt Peace went on. "I will take the front yard myself, and the beds here shall be equally divided among you three. You may plant in them what you please and each shall attend to his own."

"I speak for vegetables," said Lynn.

"How characteristic," murmured Iris, with a sidelong glance at him which sent the blood

to his face. "What shall you plant, Mrs. Irving?"

"Roses, heartsease, and verbenas," she replied, "and as many other things as I can get in without crowding. I may change my mind about the others, but I shall have those three. What are you going to have?"

"Violets and mignonette, nothing more. I love the sweet, modest ones the best."

"Cucumbers, tomatoes, corn, melons, peas, asparagus," put in Lynn, "and what else?"

"Nothing else, my son," answered Margaret, "unless you rent a vacant acre or two. The seeds are small, but the plants have been known to spread."

"I'll have one plant of each kind, then, for I must assuredly have variety. It's said to be 'the spice of life' and that's what we're all looking for. Besides, judging from the various scornful remarks which have been thought, if not actually made, the rest of you don't care for vegetables. Anyhow, you sha'n't have any—except Aunt Peace."

"Over here now, please, Lynn," said Miss Field. "When you get that done, I'll tell you what to do next. Come, Margaret, it's

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a little chilly here, and I don't want you to take cold."

For a few moments there was quiet in the garden. A flock of pigeons hovered about Iris, taking grain from her outstretched hand, and cooing soft murmurs of content. The white dove was perched upon her shoulder, not at all disturbed by her various excursions to the source of supply. Lynn worked steadily, seemingly unconscious of the girl's scrutiny.

Finally, she spoke. "I don't want any of your old vegetables," she said.

"How fortunate!"

"You may not have any at all—I don't believe the seeds will come up."

"Perhaps not—it 's quite in the nature of things."

The pouter pigeon, brave in his iridescent waistcoat, perched upon her other shoulder, and Lynn straightened himself to look at her. From the first evening she had puzzled him.

Her face was nearly always pale, but to-day she had a pretty colour in her cheeks and her deep, violet eyes were aglow with innocent mischief. There was a dewy sweetness about her red lips, and Lynn noted that the sheen on

the pigeon's breast was like the gleam from her blue-black hair, where the sun shone upon it. She had a great mass of it, which she wore coiled on top of her small, well-shaped head. It was perfectly smooth, its riotous waves kept well in check, except at the blue-veined temples, where little ringlets clustered, unrebuked.

"You should be practising," said Iris, irrelevantly.

"So should you."

"I don't need to."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not going to play with you any more."

"Why, Iris?"

"Oh," she returned, with a little shrug of her shoulders, which frightened away both pigeons, "you didn't like the way I played your last accompaniment, and so I've stopped for good."

Lynn thought it only a repetition of what she had said when he criticised her, and passed it over in silence.

"I've already done an hour," he said, "and I'll have time for another before lunch. I can get in the other two before dark, and then

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I 'm going for a walk. You 'll come with me, won't you ?"

"You have n't asked me properly," she objected.

Irving bowed and, in set, gallant phrases, asked Miss Temple for "the pleasure of her company."

"I 'm sorry," she answered, "but I 'm obliged to refuse. I 'm going to make some little cakes for tea—the kind you like."

"Bother the cakes!"

"Then," laughed Iris, "if you want me as much as that, I 'll go. It 's my Christian duty."

From the very beginning, Aunt Peace had taught Iris the principles of dainty housewifery. Cleanliness came first—an exquisite cleanliness which was not merely a lack of dust and dirt, but a positive quality. When the old lady's keen eyes, reinforced by her strongest glasses, were unable to discern so much as a finger mark upon anything, Iris knew that it was clean, and not before.

At first, the little untrained child had bitterly rebelled, but Miss Field's patience was without limit and at last Iris attained the required degree of proficiency. She had done

her sampler, like the Colonial maids before her, made her white, sweet loaves, her fragrant brown ones, put up her countless pots of clear, rich preserves, made amber and crimson jellies, huge jars of spiced fruits, and brewed ten different kinds of home-made wine. Then, and not till then, Iris got the womanly idea which was beneath it all. Perception came slowly, but at length she found herself in a beautiful comradeship with Aunt Peace. For sheer love of the daintiness of it, Iris beat the yolks of eggs in a white bowl and the whites in a blue one. She took pleasure out of various fine textures and feathery masses, sang as she shaped small pats of unsalted butter, tying them up in clover blossoms, and laughed at the little packets of seeds Dame Nature sends with her parcels.

"See," said Iris, one morning, as she cut a juicy muskmelon and took out the seeds, "this means that if you like it well enough to work and wait, you can have lots, lots more."

Miss Field smiled, and a soft pink colour came into her fine, high-bred face. For one, at least, she had opened the way to the Fortunate Isles, where one's daily work is one's daily

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happiness, and nothing is so poor as to be without its own appealing beauty.

As time went on, Iris found deep and satisfying pleasure in the countless little things that were done each day. She piled the clean linen in orderly rows upon the shelves, delighting in the unnamable freshness made by wind and sun; sniffed appreciatively at the cedar chest which stood in a recess of the upper hall, and climbed many a chair to fasten bunches of fragrant herbs, gathered with her own hands, to the rafters in the attic.

She washed the fine old china, rubbed the mahogany till she could see her face in it, and kept the silver shining. "A gentlewoman," Aunt Peace had said, "will always be independent of her servants, and there are certain things no gentlewoman will trust her servants to do."

Upon this foundation, Aunt Peace had reared the beautiful superstructure of her life. Her hands were capable and strong, yet soft and white. As we learn to love the things we take care of, so every household possession became dear to her, and repaid her for her labours an hundred-fold.

To be sure of doing the very best for her

adopted daughter, Miss Field had, for many years, kept house without a servant. Now, at seventy-five, she had grudgingly admitted one maid into her sanctum, but some of the work still fell to Iris, and no one ever doubted for an instant that the head of the household vigilantly guarded her own rights.

For a long time Iris had known how useless it was—that there had never been a moment when the old lady could not have had a retinue of servants at her command, but had it been useless after all? Remembering the child she had been, Iris could not but see the immeasurable advance the woman had made.

"Some day, my child," Aunt Peace had said, "when your adopted mother is laid away with her ancestors in the churchyard, you will bless me for what I have done. You will see that wherever you happen to be, in whatever station of life God may be pleased to place you after I am gone, you have one thing which cannot be taken away from you—the power to make for yourself a home. You will be sure of your comfort independently, and you will never be at the mercy of the ignorant and the untrained. In more than one

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sense," went on Miss Field, smiling, "you will have the gift of Peace."

In the house, in her favourite chair by the fire, the old lady was saying much the same thing to Margaret Irving. It was apropos of a book written by a member of the shrieking sisterhood, which had sorely stirred East Lancaster, set as it was in quiet ways that were centuries old.

"I have no patience with such foolishness," Aunt Peace observed. "Since Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden, women have been home-makers and men have been home-builders. All the work in the world is directly and immediately undertaken for the maintenance and betterment of the home. A woman who has no love for it is unsexed. God probably knew how He wanted it—at least we may be pardoned for supposing that He did. It is absolutely—but I would better stop, my dear. I fear I shall soon be saying something unladylike."

Margaret laughed—a low, musical laugh with a girlish note in it. For a long time she had not been so happy as she was to-day.

"To quote a famous historian," she replied, "a book like that 'carries within itself the

germs of its decay.' You need have no fear, Aunt Peace; the home will stand. This single house, this beautiful old home of yours, has lasted two centuries, has n't it, just as it is?"

"Yes," sighed the other, after a pause, "they built well in those days."

The charm of the room was upon them both. Through the open door they could see the long line of portraits in the hall, and the house seemed peopled with friendly ghosts, whose memories and loves still lived. Because she had recently come from a city apartment, Margaret looked down the spacious vista, ending at a long mirror, with an ever-increasing sense of delight.

"My dear," said Miss Field, "I have always felt that this house should have come to you."

"I have never felt so," answered Margaret. "I have never for a moment begrudged it to you. You know my father died suddenly, and his will, made long before I was born, had not been changed. So what was more natural than for my mother to have the house during her lifetime, with the provision that it should revert to his favourite sister afterward, if she still lived?"

"I have cheated you by living, Margaret, and your mother was cut off in her prime. She was a hard woman."

"Yes," sighed Margaret, "she was. But I think she meant to be kind."

"I knew her very little ; in fact, the only chance that I ever had to get acquainted with her was when I came here for a short visit just after you were married. The house had been closed for a long time. She took you away with her, and when she came back she was alone. Then she wrote to me, asking me to share her loneliness for a time, and I consented."

The way was open for confidences, but Margaret made none, and Aunt Peace respected her for it.

"We never knew each other very well, did we?" asked the old lady, in a tone that indicated no need of an answer. "I remember that when I was here I yearned over you just as I did over Iris several years later. I wanted to give to you out of my abundance ; to make you happy and comfortable."

"Dear Aunt Peace," said Margaret, softly, "you are doing it now, when perhaps I need it even more than I did then. All your life

you have been making people happy and comfortable."

"I hope so—it is what I have tried to do. By the way, when I am through with it, this house goes to you, then to Lynn and his children after him."

"Thank you." For an instant Margaret's pulses throbbed with the joy of possession, then the blood retreated from her heart in shame.

"I have made ample provision for Iris," Miss Field went on. "She is my own dear daughter, but she is not of our line."

At this moment, Iris came around the house, laughing and screaming, with Lynn in full pursuit. Mrs. Irving went to the window and came back with an amused light in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" asked Aunt Peace.

"Lynn is chasing her. He had something in his fingers that looked like an angle-worm."

"No doubt. Iris is afraid of worms."

"I'll go out and speak to him."

"No—let them fight it out. We are never young but once, and Youth asks no greater privilege than to fight its own battles. It

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is mistaken kindness to shield—it weakens one in the years to come."

"Youth," repeated Margaret. "The most beautiful gift of the gods, which we never appreciate until it is gone forever."

"I have kept mine," said Aunt Peace. "I have deliberately forgotten all the unpleasant things and remembered the others. When a little pleasure has flashed for a moment against the dark, I have made that jewel mine. I have hundreds of them, from the time my baby fingers clasped my first rose, to the night you and Lynn came to bring more sunshine into my old life. I call it my Necklace of Perfect Joy. When the world goes wrong, I have only to close my eyes and remember all the links in my chain, set with gems, some large and some small, but all beautiful with the beauty which never fades. It is all I can take with me when I go. My material possessions must stay behind, but my Necklace of Perfect Joy will bring me happiness to the end, when I put it on, to be nevermore unclasped."

"Aunt Peace," asked Margaret, after an understanding silence, "why did you never marry?"

Miss Field leaned forward and methodically stirred the fire. "I may be wrong," she said, "but I have always felt that it was indelicate to allow one's self to care for a gentleman."

IV

Social Position

Social Position

ON Wednesday, the dullest person might have felt that there was something in the air. The old house, already exquisitely clean, received further polishing without protest. Savoury odours came from the kitchen, and Iris rubbed the tall silver candlesticks until they shone like new.

"What is it?" asked Lynn. "Are we going to have a party and am I invited?"

"It is Wednesday," explained Iris.

"Well, what of it?"

"Doctor Brinkerhoff comes to see Aunt Peace every Wednesday evening."

"Who is Doctor Brinkerhoff?"

"The family physician of East Lancaster."

"He was n't here last Wednesday."

"That was because you and your mother had just come. Aunt Peace sent him a note, saying that her attention was for the moment

occupied by other guests from out of town. It was the first Wednesday evening he has missed for more than ten years."

"Oh," said Lynn. "Are they going to be married?"

"Aunt Peace would n't marry anybody. She receives Doctor Brinkerhoff because she is sorry for him."

"He has no social position," Iris continued, feeling the unspoken question. "He is not of our class and he used to live in West Lancaster, but Aunt Peace says that any gentleman who is received by a lady in her bedroom may also be received in her parlour. Another lady, who thinks as Aunt Peace does, entertains him on Saturday evenings."

Iris sat there demurely, her rosy lips primly pursed, and vigorously rubbed the tall candlestick. Lynn fairly choked with laughter. "Oh," he cried, "you funny little thing!"

"I am not a little thing and I am not funny. I consider you very impertinent."

"What is 'social position'?" asked Irving, instantly sobering. "How do we get it?"

"It is born with us," answered Iris, dipping her flannel cloth in ammonia, "and we

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have to live up to it. If we have low tastes, we lose it, and it never comes back."

"Wonder if I have it," mused Lynn.

"Of course," Iris assured him. "You are a grand-nephew of Aunt Peace, but not so nearly related as I, because I am her legal daughter. I was born of poor but honest parents," she went on, having evidently absorbed the phrase from her school Reader, "so I was respectable, even at the beginning. When Aunt Peace took me, I got social position, and if I am always a lady, I will keep it. Otherwise not."

The girl was very lovely as she leaned back in the quaint old chair to rest for a moment. She was still regarding the candlestick attentively and did not look at Lynn. "It is strange to me," she said, "that coming from the city, as you do, you should not know about such things." Here she sent him the quickest possible glance from a pair of inscrutable eyes, and he began to wonder if she were not merely amusing herself. He was tempted to kiss her, but wisely refrained.

"Iris," called Aunt Peace, from the doorway, "will you wash the Royal Worcester

plate? And Lynn, it is time you were practising."

Lynn worked hard until the bell rang for luncheon. When he went down, he found the others already at the table. "We did not wait for you," Aunt Peace explained, "because we were in a hurry. Immediately after luncheon, on Wednesdays, I take my nap. I sleep from two to three. Will you please see that the house is quiet?"

She spoke to Margaret, but she looked at Lynn. "Which means," said he, "that those who are studying the violin will kindly not practise until after three o'clock, and that it would be considered a kindness if they would not walk much in the house, their feet being heavy."

"Lynn," said the old lady, irrelevantly, "you are extremely intelligent. I expect great things of you."

That weekly hour of luxury was the only relaxation in Miss Field's busy, happy life. Breakfast at seven and bed at ten—this was the ironclad rule of the house. Ever since she came to East Lancaster, Iris had kept solemn guard over the front door on Wednesdays, from two to three. Rash

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visitors never reached the bell, but were met, on the doorstep, by a little maid whose tiny finger rested upon her lip. "Hush," she would say, "Aunt Peace is asleep!" Interruptions were infrequent, however, for East Lancaster knew Miss Field's habits—and respected them.

"Good-bye, my dears," she said, as she paused at the foot of the winding stairs, "I leave you for a far country, where, perhaps, I shall meet some of my old friends. I shall visit strange lands and have many new experiences, some of which will doubtless be impossible and grotesque. I shall be gone but one short hour, and when I return I shall have much to tell you."

"She dreams," explained Iris, in a low voice, as the mistress of the mansion smiled back at them over the railing, "and when she wakes she always tells me."

Lynn went out for a long tramp, after vainly endeavouring to persuade his mother or Iris to accompany him. "I'm walked enough at night as it is," said Mrs. Irving, and the girl excused herself on account of her household duties.

He clattered down the steps, banged the

gate, and went whistling down the elm-bordered path. The mother listened, fondly, till the cheery notes died away in the distance. "Bless his heart," she said to herself, "how fine and strong he is and how much I love him!"

The house seemed to wait while its guardian spirit slept. Left to herself, Margaret paced to and fro; down the long hall, then back, through the parlour and library, and so on, restlessly, until she reflected that she might possibly disturb Aunt Peace.

A love-lorn robin, in the overhanging boughs of the maple at the gate, was unsuccessfully courting a disdainful lady who sat on the topmost twig and paid no attention to him. From the distant orchard came the breath of apple blooms, and a single bluebird winged his solitary way across the fields, his colour gleaming brightly for an instant against the silvery clouds. Beautiful as it was, Margaret sighed, and her face lost its serenity.

A bit of verse sang itself through her memory again and again.

" Who wins his love shall lose her,
Who loses her shall gain,
For still the spirit wooes her,
A soul without a stain,

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And memory still pursues her
With longings not in vain.

. . . . .

" In dreams she grows not older
The lands of Dream among;
Though all the world wax colder,
Though all the songs be sung,
In dreams doth he behold her —
Still fair and kind and young."

"Dreams," she murmured, "empty dreams, while your soul starves."

Iris tiptoed in with her sewing and sat down. Margaret felt her presence in the room, but did not turn away from the window. Iris was one of those rare people with whom one could be silent and not feel that the proprieties had been injured.

Deep down in her heart, Margaret had stored away all the bitterness of her life — that single drop which is well enough when left by itself, because it is of a different specific gravity. When the cup is stirred, the lees taint the whole, and it takes time for the readjustment. Were it not for the merciful readjustment, this grey old world of ours would be too dark to live in.

At length she turned and looked at the little seamstress, who sat bolt upright, as she had

been taught, in the carved mahogany chair. She noted the long lashes that swept the tinted cheek, the masses of blue-black hair over the low, white brow, the tender wistfulness in the lines of the mouth, the dimpled hands, and the rounded arm — so evidently made for all the sweet uses of love that Margaret's heart contracted in sudden pain.

"Iris," she said, in a tone that startled the girl, "when the right man comes, and you know absolutely in your own heart that he is the right man, go with him, whether he be prince or beggar. If unhappiness comes to you, take it bravely, as a gentlewoman should, but never, for your own sake, allow yourself to regret your faith in him. If you love him and he loves you, there are no barriers between you — they are nothing but cobwebs. Sweep them aside with a single stroke of magnificent daring, and go. Social position counts for nothing, other people's opinions count for nothing; it is between your heart and his, and in that sanctuary no one else has a right to intrude. If he has only a crust to give you, share it with him, but do not let anyone persuade you into a lifetime of heart-hunger—it is too hard to bear!"

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The girl's deep eyes were fixed upon her, childish, appealing, and yet with evident understanding. Margaret's face was full of tender pity — was this butterfly, too, destined to be broken on the wheel?

Iris felt the sudden passion of the other, saw traces of suffering in the dark eyes, the set lips, and even in the slender hands that hovered whitely over the black gown. "Thank you, Mrs. Irving," she said, quietly, "I understand."

The minutes ticked by, and no other word was spoken. At half-past three, precisely, Aunt Peace came back. She had on her best gown — a soft, heavy black silk, simply made. At the neck and wrists were bits of rare old lace, and her one jewel, an emerald of great beauty and value, gleamed at her throat. She wore no rings except the worn band of gold that had been her mother's wedding ring.

"What did you dream?" asked Iris.

"Nothing, dearie," she laughed. "I have never slept so soundly before. Our guests have put a charm upon the house."

From the embroidered work-bag that dangled at her side, she took out the thread lace she was making, and began to count her stitches.

"I think I'll get my sewing, too," said Margaret. "I feel like a drone in this hive of industry."

"One, two, three, chain," said Aunt Peace. "Iris, do you think the cakes are as good as they were last time?"

"I think they're even better."

"Did you take out the oldest port?"

"Yes, the very oldest."

"I trust he was not hurt," Aunt Peace went on, "because last week I asked him not to come. The common people sometimes feel those things more keenly than aristocrats, who are accustomed to the disturbance of guests."

"Of course, he would be disappointed," said Iris, with a little smile, "but he would understand—I'm sure he would."

When Margaret came back she had a white, fluffy garment over her arm. Who would have thought," she cried, gaily, "that I should ever have the time to make myself a petticoat by hand! The atmosphere of East Lancaster has wrought a wondrous change in me."

"Iris," said Miss Field, "let me see your stitches."

The girl held up her petticoat—a dainty garment of finest cambric, lace-trimmed and

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exquisitely made, and the old lady examined it critically. "It is not what I could do at your age," she continued, "but it will answer very well."

Lynn came in noisily, remembering only at the threshold that one did not whistle in East Lancaster houses. "I had a fine tramp," he said, "all over West Lancaster and through the woods on both sides of it. I had some flowers for all of you, but I laid them down on a stone and forgot to go back after them. Aunt Peace, you 're looking fine since you had your nap. Still working at that petticoat, mother?"

"We 're all making petticoats," answered Margaret. "Even Aunt Peace is knitting lace for one and Iris has hers almost done."

"Let me see it," said Lynn. He reached over and took it out of the girl's lap while she was threading her needle. Much to his surprise, it was immediately snatched away from him. Iris paused only long enough to administer a sounding box to the offender's ear, then marched out of the room with her head high and her work under her arm.

"Well, of all things," said Lynn, ruefully. "Why would n't she let me look at her petticoat?"

"Because," answered Aunt Peace, severely, "Iris has been brought up like a lady! Gentlemen did not expect to see ladies' petticoats when I was young!"

"Oh," said Lynn, "I see." His mouth twitched and he glanced sideways at his mother. She was bending over her work, and her lips did not move, but he could see that her eyes smiled.

At exactly half-past seven, the expected guest was ushered into the parlour. "Good evening, Doctor," said Miss Field, in her stately way; "I assure you this is quite a pleasure." She presented him to Mrs. Irving and Lynn, and motioned him to an easy-chair.

He was tall, straight, and seventy; almost painfully neat, and evidently a gentleman of the old school.

"I trust you are well, madam?"

"I am always well," returned Aunt Peace. "If all the other old ladies in East Lancaster were as well as I, you would soon be obliged to take down your sign and seek another location."

The others took but small part in the conversation, which was never lively, and which,

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indeed, might have been stilted by the presence of strangers. It was the commonplace talk of little things, which distinguishes the country town, and it lasted for half an hour. As the clock chimed eight, Miss Field smiled at him significantly.

"Shall we play chess?" she asked.

"If the others will excuse us, I shall be charmed," he responded.

Soon they were deep in their game. Margaret went after a book she had been reading, and the young people went to the library, where they could talk undisturbed.

They played three games. Miss Field won the first and third, her antagonist contenting himself with the second. It had always been so, and for ten years she had taken a childish delight in her skill. "My dear Doctor," she often said, "it takes a woman of brains to play chess."

"It does, indeed," he invariably answered, with an air of gallantry. Once he had been indiscreet and had won all three games, but that was in the beginning and it had never happened since.

When the clock struck ten, he looked at his heavy, old-fashioned silver watch with appar-

ent surprise. "I had no idea it was so late," he said. "I must be going!"

"Pray wait a moment, Doctor. Let me offer you some refreshment before you begin that long walk. Iris?"

"Yes, Aunt Peace." The girl knew very well what was expected of her, and dimples came and went around the corners of her mouth.

"Those little cakes that we had for tea—perhaps there may be one or two left, and is there not a little wine?"

"I'll see."

Smiling at the pretty comedy, she went out into the kitchen, where Doctor Brinkerhoff's favourite cakes, freshly made, had been carefully put away. Only one of them had been touched, and that merely to make sure of the quality.

With the Royal Worcester plate, generously piled with cakes, a tray of glasses, and a decanter of Miss Field's famous port, she went back into the parlour.

"This is very charming," said the Doctor. He had made the same speech once a week for ten years. Aunt Peace filled the glasses, and when all had been served, she looked at

Social Position

him with a rare smile upon her beautiful old face.

Then the brim of his glass touched hers with the clear ring of crystal. "To your good health, madam!"

"And to your prosperity," she returned. The old toast still served.

"And now, my dear Miss Iris," he said, "may we not hope for a song?"

"Which one?"

"'Annie Laurie,' if you please."

She sang the old ballad with a wealth of feeling in her deep voice, and even Lynn, who was listening critically, was forced to admit that she did it well.

At eleven, the guest went away, his hostess cordially inviting him to come again.

"What a charming man," said Margaret.

"An old brick," added Lynn, with more force than elegance.

"Yes," replied Aunt Peace, concealing a yawn behind her fan, "it is a thousand pities that he has no social position."

V

The Light of Dreams

"HOW do you get on with the Master?" asked Iris.

"After a fashion," answered Irving; "but I do not get on with Fräulein Fredrika at all. She despises me."

"She does not like many people."

"So it would seem. I have been unfortunate from the first, though I was careful to admire 'mine crazy jug.'"

"It is the apple of her eye," laughed Iris. "it means to her just what his Cremona means to him."

"It is a wonderful creation, and I told her so, but where in the dickens did she get the idea?"

"Don't ask me. Did you happen to notice anything else?"

"No—only the violin. Sometimes I take my lesson in the parlour, sometimes in the

shop downstairs, or even in Herr Kaufmann's bedroom, which opens off of it. When I come, he stops whatever he happens to be doing, sits down, and proceeds with my education."

"On the floor," said Iris reminiscently, "she has a gold jar which contains cat tails and grasses. It is Herr Kaufmann's silk hat, which he used to have when he played in the famous orchestra, with the brim cut off and plenty of gold paint put on. The gilded potato-masher, with blue roses on it, which swings from the hanging lamp, was done by your humble servant. She has loved me ever since."

"Iris!" exclaimed Lynn, reproachfully. "How could you!"

"How could I what?"

"Paint anything so outrageous as that?"

"My dear boy," said Miss Temple, patronisingly, with her pretty head a little to one side, "you are young in the ways of the world. I was not achieving a work of art; I was merely giving pleasure to the Fräulein. Much trouble would be saved if people who undertake to give pleasure would consult the wishes of the recipient in preference to their own. Tastes differ, as even you may have ob-

served. Personally, I have no use for a gilded potato-masher—I could n't even live in the same house with one,—but I was pleasing her, not myself."

"I wonder what I could do that would please her," said Lynn, half to himself.

"Make her something out of nothing," suggested Iris. "She would like that better than anything else. She has a wall basket made of a fish broiler, a chair that was once a barrel, a dresser which has been evolved from a packing box, a sofa that was primarily a cot, and a match box made from a tin cup, covered with silk and gilded on the inside, not to mention heaps of other things."

"Then what is left for me? The desirable things seem to have been used up."

"Wait," said Iris, "and I'll show you." She ran off gaily, humming a little song under her breath, and came back presently with a clothes-pin, a sheet of orange-coloured tissue paper, an old black ostrich feather, and her paints.

"What in the world—" began Lynn.

"Don't be impatient, please. Make the clothes-pin gold, with a black head, and then I'll show you what to do next."

The Light of Dreams

"Aren't you going to help me?"

"Only with my valuable advice—it is your gift, you know."

Awkwardly, Lynn gilded the clothes-pin and suspended it from the back of a chair to dry. "I hope she'll like it," he said. "She pointed to me once and said something in German to her brother. I didn't understand, but I remembered the words, and when I got home I looked them up in my dictionary. As nearly as I could get it, she had characterised me as 'a big, lumbering calf.'"

"Discerning woman," commented Iris. "Now, take this sheet of tissue paper and squeeze it up into a little ball, then straighten it out and do it again. When it's all soft and crinkly, I'll tell you what to do next."

"There," exclaimed Lynn, finally, "if it's squeezed up any more it will break."

"Now paint the head of the clothes-pin and make some straight black lines on the middle of it, crossways."

"Will you please tell me what I'm making?"

"Wait and see!"

Obeying instructions, he fastened the paper tightly in the fork of the clothes-pin, and

spread it out on either side. The corners were cut and pulled into the semblance of wings, and black circles were painted here and there. Iris herself added the finishing touch—two bits of the ostrich feather glued to the top of the head for antennæ.

"Oh," cried Lynn, in pleased surprise, "a butterfly!"

"How hideous!" said Margaret, pausing in the doorway. "I trust it's not meant for me."

"It's for the Fräulein," answered Iris, gathering up her paints and sweeping aside the litter. "Lynn has made it all by himself."

"I wonder how he stands it," mused Irving, critically inspecting the butterfly.

"I asked him once," said Iris, "if he liked all the queer things in his house, and he shrugged his shoulders. 'What good is mine art to me,' he asked, 'if it makes me so I cannot live with mine sister? Fredrika likes the gay colours, such as one sees in the fields, but they hurt mine eyes. Still because the tidies and the crazy jug swear to me, it is no reason for me to hurt mine sister's feelings. We have a large house. Fredrika has the

upstairs and I have the downstairs. When I can no longer stand the bright lights, I can turn mine back and look out of the window, or I can go down in the shop with mine violins. Down there I see no colours and I can put mine feet on all chairs.'"

Lynn laughed, but Margaret, who was listening intently, only smiled sadly.

That afternoon, when the boy went up the hill, with the butterfly dangling from his hand by a string, he was greeted with childish cries of delight on either side. Hoping for equal success at the Master's, he rang the bell, and the Fräulein came to the door. When she saw who it was, her face instantly became hard and forbidding.

"Mine brudder is not home," she said, frostily.

"I know," answered Lynn, with a winning smile, "but I came to see you. See, I made this for you."

Wonder and delight were in her eyes as she took it from his outstretched hand. "For me?"

"Yes, all for you. I made it."

"You make this for me by yourself alone?"

"No, Miss Temple helped me."

"Miss Temple," repeated the Fräulein, "she is most kind. And you likewise," she hastened to add. "It will be of a niceness if Miss Temple and you shall come to mine house to tea to-morrow evening."

"I 'll ask her," he returned, "and thank you very much." Thus Lynn made his peace with Fräulein Fredrika.

Laughing like two irresponsible children, they went up the hill together at the appointed time. Lynn's arms were full of wild crab-apple blooms, which he had taken a long walk to find, and Iris had two little pots of preserves as her contribution to the feast.

Their host and hostess were waiting for them at the door. Fräulein Fredrika was very elegant in her best gown, and her sharp eyes were kind. The Master was clad in rusty black, which bore marks of frequent sponging and occasional pressing. "It is most kind," he said, bowing gallantly to Iris; "and you, young man, I am glad to see you, as always."

Iris found a stone jar for the apple blossoms and brought them in. The Master's fine old face beamed as he drew a long breath of pink

and white sweetness." It is like magic," he said. "I think inside of every tree there must be some beautiful young lady, such as we read about in the old books—a young lady something like Miss Iris. All Winter, when it is cold, she sleeps in her soft bed, made from the silk lining of the bark. Then one day the sun shines warm and the robin sings to her and wakes her. 'What,' says she, 'is it so soon Spring? I must get to work right away at mine apple blossoms.'

"Then she stoops down for some sand and some dirt. In her hands she moulds it—so—reaching out for some rain to keep it together. Then she says one charm. With a forked stick she packs it into every little place inside that apple tree and sprinkles some more of it over the outside.

"'Now,' says she, 'we must wait, for I have done mine work well. It is for the sun and the wind and the rain to finish. So the rain makes all very wet, and the wind blows and the sun shines, and presently the sand and dirt that she has put in is changed to sap that is so glad it runs like one squirrel all over the inside of the tree and tries to sing like one bird.

"'So,' says this young lady, 'it is as I

thought.' Then she says one more charm, and when the sun comes up in the morning, it sees that the branches are all covered with buds and leaves. The young lady and the moon work one little while at it in the evening, and the next morning, there is — this!"

The Master buried his face in the fragrant blooms. "It is a most wonderful sweetness," he went on. "It is wind and grass and sun, and the souls of all the apple blossoms that are dead."

"Franz," called Fräulein Fredrika, "you will bring them out to tea, yes?"

As the entertainment progressed, Lynn's admiration of Iris increased. She seemed equally at home in Miss Field's stately mansion and in the tiny bird-house on the brink of a precipice, where everything appeared to be made out of something else. She was in high spirits and kept them all laughing. Yet, in spite of her merry chatter, there was an undertone of tender wistfulness that set his heart to beating.

The Master, too, was at his best. Usually, he was reserved and quiet, but to-night the barriers were down. He told them stories of his student days in Germany, wonderful

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adventures by land and sea, and conjured up glimpses of the kings and queens of the Old World. "Life," he sighed, "is very strange. One begins within an hour's walk of the Imperial Palace, where sometimes one may see the Kaiser and the Kaiserin, and one ends —here!"

"Wherever one may be, that is the best place," said the Fräulein. "The dear God knows. Yet sometimes I, too, must think of mine Germany and wish for it."

"Fredrika!" cried the Master, "are you not happy here?"

"Indeed, yes, Franz, always." Her harsh voice was softened and her piercing eyes were misty. One saw that, however carefully hidden, there was great love between these two.

Iris helped the Fräulein with the dishes, in spite of her protests. "One does not ask one's guests to help with the work," she said.

"But just suppose," answered Iris, laughing, "that one's guests have washed dishes hundreds of times at home!"

In the parlour, meanwhile, the Master talked to Lynn. He told him of great violinists he had heard and of famous old violins

he had seen—but there was never a word about the Cremona.

"Mine friend, the Doctor," said the Master, "do you perchance know him?"

"Yes," answered Lynn, "I have that pleasure. He's all right, is n't he?"

"So he thinks," returned the Master, missing the point of the phrase. "In an argument, one can never convince him. He thinks it is for me to go out on one grand tour and give many concerts and secure much fame, but why should I go, I ask him, when I am happy here? So many people know what should make one happy a thousand times better than the happy one knows. Life," he said again, "is very strange."

It was a long time before he spoke again. "I have had mine fame," he said. "I have played to great houses both here and abroad, and women have thrown red roses at me and mine violin. There has been much in the papers, and I have had many large sums, which, of course, I have always given to the poor. One should use one's art to do good with and not to become rich. I have mine house, mine clothes, all that is good for me to eat, mine sister and mine—" he hesitated

for an instant, and Lynn knew he was thinking of the Cremona. "Mine violins," he concluded, "mine little shop where I make them, and best of all, mine dreams."

Iris came back and Fräulein Fredrika followed her. "If you will give me all the little shells," she was saying, "I will stick them together with glue and make mineself one little house to sit on the parlour table. It will be most kind." Her voice was caressing and her face fairly shone with joy.

"I will light the lamp," she went on. "It is dark here now." Suiting the action to the word, she pulled down the lamp that hung by heavy chains in the centre of the room, and the gilded potato-masher swung back and forth violently.

"No, no, Fredrika," said the Master. "It is not a necessity to light the lamp."

"Herr Irving," she began, "would you not like the lamp to see by?"

"Not at all," answered Lynn. "I like the twilight best."

"Come, Fräulein," said Iris, "sit over here by me. Did I tell you how you could make a little clothes-brush out of braided rope and a bit of blue ribbon?"

"No," returned the Fräulein, excitedly, "you did not. It will be most kind if you will do it now."

The women talked in low tones and the others were silent without listening. The street was in shadow, and here and there lanterns flashed in the dark. Down in the valley, velvety night was laid over the river and the willows that grew along its margin, but the last light lingered on the blue hills above, and a single star had set its exquisite lamp to gleaming against the afterglow.

The wings of darkness hovered over the little house, and yet no word was spoken. It was an intimate hush, such as sometimes falls between lovers, who have no need of speech. Lynn and Iris looked forward to the future, with the limitless hope of Youth, while the others brooded over a past which had brought each of them a generous measure of joy and pain.

The full moon came out from behind the clouds and flooded the valley with silver light. "Oh," cried Iris, "how glorious it is!"

"Yes," said the Master, "it is the light of dreams. All the ugliness is hidden, as in life,

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when one can dream. Only the beauty is left. Wait, I will play it to you."

He went downstairs for his violin and Lynn moved closer to Iris. Fräulein Fredrika retreated into the shadow at the farthest corner of the room.

Presently the Master returned, snapping and tightening the strings. It was not the Cremona, but the other. He sat down by the window and the moonlight touched his face caressingly. He was grey with his fifty years and more, but as he sat there, his massive head thrown back and his hair silvered, he seemed very near to the Gates of Youth.

In a moment, he was lost to his surroundings. He tapped the bow on the sill, as an orchestra leader taps for attention, straightened himself, smiled, and began.

It was a rippling, laughing melody, played on muted strings, full of unexpected harmonies, and quaintly phrased. In a moment, they caught the witchery of it, and the meaning. It was Titania and her fairies, suddenly transported half-way around the world.

Mystery and magic were in the theme. Moonbeams shimmered through it, elves played here and there, and shining waters

sang through Summer silences. All at once there was a pause, then, sonorous, deep, and splendid, came another harmony, which in impassioned beauty voiced the ministry of pain.

As before, Lynn saw chiefly the technique. Never for a moment did he forget the instrument. Iris was trembling, for she well knew those high and lonely places of the spirit, within the borders of Gethsemane.

The Master put down the violin and sighed. "Come," faltered Iris, "it is late and we must go."

He did not hear, and it was Fräulein Fredrika who went to the door with them. "Franz is thinking," she whispered. "He is often like that. He will be most sorry when he learns that you have gone."

"This way," said Iris, when they reached the street. They went to the brow of the cliff and looked once more across the shadowed valley to the luminous ranges of the everlasting hills. She turned away at last, thrilled to the depths of her soul. "Come," she whispered, "we must go back."

They walked softly, as though they feared to disturb someone in the little house, but

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there was no sound from within nor any light save at the window, where the light of dreams streamed over the Master's face and made it young.

VI

A Letter

ROSES rioted through East Lancaster and made the gardens glorious with bloom. The year was at its bridal and every chalice was filled with fragrant incense. Bees, powdered with pollen, hummed slowly back and forth, and the soft whir of unnumbered gossamer wings came in drowsy melody from the distant clover fields.

"June," sang Iris to herself, "June—O June, sweet June!"

She was getting ready for her daily trip to the post-office. Once in a great while there would be a letter there for Aunt Peace or Mrs. Irving. Lynn also had an intermittent correspondent or two, but the errand usually proved fruitless. Still, since Mrs. Irving's letter had lain nearly two weeks in Miss Field's box, uncalled for, it had been a point of honour with Iris to see that such a thing did not happen again.

A Letter

Books and papers were supplied in abundance by the local circulating library, and the high bookcases at Miss Field's were well filled with standard literature. Iris read everything she could lay her hands upon. Mere print exercised a certain fascination over her mind, and she had conscientiously finished every book that she had begun. Those early years, after all, are the most important. The old books are the best, and how few of us "have the time" to read them!

Ten years of browsing in a well equipped library will do much for anyone, and Iris had made the most of her opportunities. This girl of twenty, hemmed about by the narrow standards of East Lancaster, had a broad outlook upon life, a large view, that would have done credit to a woman of twice her age. From the beginning, the people of the books had been real to her, and she had filled the old house with the fairy figures of romance.

Of the things that make for happiness, the love of books comes first. No matter how the world may have used us, sure solace lies there. The weary, toilsome day drags to its disheartening close, and both love and friendship have proved powerless to appreciate or

understand, but in the quiet corner consolation can always be found. A single shelf, perhaps, suffices for one's few treasures, but who shall say it is not enough?

A book, unlike any other friend, will wait, not only upon the hour, but upon the mood. It asks nothing and gives much, when one comes in the right way. The volumes stand in serried ranks at attention, listening eagerly, one may fancy, for the command.

Is your world a small one, made unendurable by a thousand petty cares? Are the heart and soul of you cast down by bitter disappointment? Would you leave it all, if only for an hour, and come back with a new point of view? Then open the covers of a book.

With this gentle comrade, you may journey to the very end of the world and even to the beginning of civilisation. There is no land which you may not visit, from Arctic snows to the loftiest peaks of southern mountains. Gallant gentlemen will go with you and tell you how to appreciate what you see. Further still, there are excursions into the boundless regions of imagination, where the light of dreams has laid its surpassing beauty over all.

Would you wander in company with sol-

A Letter

diers of Fortune, and share their wonderful adventures? Would you live in the time of the Crusades and undertake a pilgrimage in the name of the Cross? Would you smell the smoke of battle, hear the ring of steel, the rattle of musketry, and see the colours break into deathly beauty well in advance of the charge? Would you have for your friends a great company of noble men and women who have wrought and suffered and triumphed in the end? Would you find new courage, stronger faith, and serene hope? Then open the covers of a book, and presto—change!

"Iris," called Aunt Peace, "you 're surely not going without your hat?"

"Of course not." The colour that came and went in her damask cheeks was very like that in her pink dimity gown. She put on her white hat, the brim drooping beneath its burden of pink roses, and drew her gloves reluctantly over her dimpled hands.

"Iris, dear, your sunshade!"

"Yes, Aunt Peace." She came back, a little unwillingly, but tan was a personal disgrace in East Lancaster.

Ready at last, she tripped down the path

and closed the gate carefully. Mrs. Irving waved a friendly hand at her from the upper window. "Bring me a letter!" she called.

"I'll try to," answered Iris, "but I can't promise."

She lifted her gown a little, to keep it clear of burr and brier, and one saw the smooth, black silk stocking, chastely embroidered at the ankle, as one suspected, by the hand of the wearer, and the dainty, high-heeled shoes. The sunshade waved back and forth coquettishly. It seemed to be an airy ornament, rather than an article of utility.

Half-way down the street, she met Doctor Brinkerhoff. "Good morning, little lady," he said, with a smile.

"Good morning, sir," replied Iris, with a quaint courtesy. "I trust you are well?"

"My health is uniformly good," he returned, primly. "You must remember that I have my own drugs and potions always at hand." He made careful inquiries as to the physical and mental well-being of each member of the family, sent kindly salutations to all, made a low bow to Iris, and went on.

"A very pleasant gentleman," she said to

A Letter

herself. "What a pity that he has no social position!"

She loitered at the bridge, hanging over the railing, and looked down into the sunny depths of the little stream. All through the sweet Summer, the brook sang cheerily, by night and by day. It began in a cool, crystal pool, far up among the hills, and wandered over mossy reaches and pebbly ways, singing meanwhile of all the fragrant woodland through which it came. Hidden springs in subterranean caverns, caught by the laughing melody, went out to meet it and then followed, as the children followed the Pied Piper of old. Great with its gathered waters, it still sang as it rippled onward to its destiny, dreaming, perchance, of the time when its liquid music, lost at last, should be merged into the vast symphony of the sea.

Lynn came down the hill, swinging his violin case, and Iris, a little consciously, went on to the post-office.

Standing on tiptoe, she peered into the letter box, and then her heart gave a little leap, for there were two, yes three letters there.

"Wait a moment," called the grizzled vet-

eran who served as postmaster. "I've finally got something fer ye! Here! Miss Peace Field, Mrs. Margaret Irving, and Miss Iris Temple."

"Oh–h!" whispered Iris, in awe, "a letter for me?"

"Tain't fer nobody else, I reckon," laughed the old man. "Anyhow, it 's got your name on it."

She went out, half dazed. In all her life she had had but three letters; two from her mother, which she still kept, and one from Santa Claus. The good saint had left his communication in the little maid's stocking one Christmas eve, and it was more than a year before Iris observed that Aunt Peace and Santa Claus wrote precisely the same hand.

"For me," she said to herself, "all for me!"

It never entered her pretty head to open it. The handwriting was unfamiliar and the postmark was blurred, but it seemed to have come from the next town. The whole thing was very disturbing, but Aunt Peace would know.

Then Iris stopped suddenly in the path. It might be wicked, but, after all, why should Aunt Peace know? Why not have just one

A Letter

little secret, all to herself? The daring of it almost took her breath away, but in that single, dramatic instant, she decided.

No one was in sight, and Iris, in the shadow of a maple, tucked the letter safely away in her stocking, fancying she heard it rustle as she walked.

In her brief experience of life there had seldom been so long a day. The hours stretched on interminably, and she was never alone. She did not forget the letter for a moment, and when she had once become accustomed to the wonder of it, she was conscious of a growing, very feminine curiosity.

A little after ten, when she had dutifully kissed Aunt Peace good night, she stood alone in her room with her heart wildly beating. The door was locked and there was not even the sound of a footstep. Surely, she might read it now!

By the flickering light of her candle, she cut it at the end with the scissors, drew out the letter, and unfolded it with trembling hands.

"Iris, Daughter of the Marshes," it began, "how shall I tell you of your loveliness?

You are straight and slender as the rushes, dainty as a moonbeam, and sweet as a rose of June. Your dimpled hands make me think of white flowers, and the flush on your cheeks is like that on the petals of the first anemone.

"Midnight itself sleeps in your hair, fragrant as the Summer dusk, and your laughing lips have the colour of a scarlet geranium, but your eyes, my dear one, how shall I write to you of your eyes? They have the beauty of calm, wide waters, when sunset has given them that wonderful blue; they are eyes a man might look into during his last hour in the world, and think his whole life well spent because of them.

"Do you think me bold — your unknown lover? I am bold because my heart makes me so, and because there is no other way. I dare not ask for an answer, nor tell you my name, but if you are displeased, I am sure I have a way of finding it out. Perhaps you wonder where I have seen you, so I will tell you this. I have seen you, more than once, going to the post-office in East Lancaster, and, no matter how, I have learned your name.

"Some day, perhaps, I shall see you face

A Letter

to face. Some day you may give me your gracious permission to tell you all that is in my heart. Until then, remember that I am your knight, that you are my lady, and that I love you, Iris, love you!"

Her eyes were as luminous as the stars that shone upon the breast of night. If the heavens had suddenly opened, she could not have been more surprised. Her first love letter! At a single bound she had gained her place beside those fair ladies of romance, who peopled her maiden dreams. From to-night, she stood apart; no longer a child, but a woman worshipped afar, by some gallant lover who feared to sign his name.

She put out the candle, for the moonlight filled the room, and pattered across the polished floor, in her bare feet, to her little white bed, the letter in her hand.

> "Rose bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
> And on her silver cross soft amethyst."

The hours went by and still Iris was awake, the mute paper crushed close against her breast. "I wonder," she murmured, her crimson face hidden in the pillow, "I wonder who he can be!"

VII

Friends

THE Doctor's modest establishment consisted of two rooms over the post-office. Here his shingle swung idly in the Summer breeze or resisted the onslaughts of the Winter storms. The infrequent patient seldom met anyone else in the office, but in case there should be two at once, a dusty chair had been placed in the hall.

Both rooms were kept scrupulously clean by the wife of the postmaster, who lived on the same floor, but the bottles ranged in orderly rows upon the shelves were left severely alone, because the ministering influence lived in hourly dread of poison.

Here the family physician of East Lancaster lived out his monotonous existence. When he had first taken up his abode there, he had set up his household gods upon the hill, in company with his countrymen. He soon

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found, however, that his practice was confined to the hill, and that, for all he might know to the contrary, East Lancaster was unaware of his existence.

It was the postmaster who first set him right. "If you 're a-layin' out to heal them as has the money to pay for it," he had said, "you 'll have to move. This yere brook, what seems so innocent-like, is the chalk mark that partitions the sheep off from the goats. You 'll find it so in every place. Sometimes it 's water, sometimes it 's a car track, and sometimes a deepo, but it 's always there, though more 'n likely there ain't no real line exceptin' the one what 's drawn in folks' fool heads. I reckon, bein' as you 're a doctor, you 're familiar with that line down the middle of human's brains. Well, this yere brook is practically the same thing, considerin' East and West Lancaster for a minute as brains, the which is a high compliment to both."

So, at the earliest possible moment, the Doctor had cast in his fortunes with the "quality." East Lancaster affected refined astonishment at first, but when the resident physician, who had long enjoyed the deep

respect of the community, had been gathered to his fathers, Doctor Brinkerhoff became the last resort. His skill was universally admitted, but no one went to his office, for fear of meeting undesirable strangers. It was thought to be in better taste to pay the double fee and have the Doctor call, even for such slight ailments as boils and cut fingers.

The man was mentally broad enough to be amused at the eccentricities of East Lancaster, though his keen old eyes did not fail to discern that he was merely tolerated where he had hoped to find friends. Within the narrow confines of his establishment, he cultivated a serene and comfortable philosophy. To suit himself to his environment when that environment was out of his power to change, to seek for the good in everything and resolutely refuse to be affected by the bad, to believe steadfastly in the law of Compensation—this was Doctor Brinkerhoff's creed.

On Wednesday and Saturday evenings, he was received as an equal by two of the aristocratic families. On Sunday mornings, he never failed to attend church. Before the last notes of the bell died away, he was always in his place. After the service, he hurried away,

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making courtly acknowledgments on every side to the formal greetings.

Sunday afternoons, precisely at half-past four, he went up the hill to Herr Kaufmann's and spent the evening. This weekly visit was the leaven of Fräulein Fredrika's humdrum life. There was a sort of romance about it which glorified the commonplace and she looked forward to it with repressed excitement. Poor Fräulein Fredrika! Perhaps she, too, had her dreams.

In many respects the two men were kindred. Their conversations were frequently perfunctory, but lacked no whit of sustaining grace for that. Talk, after all, is pathetically cheap. Where one cannot understand without words, no amount of explanation will make things clear. Across impassable deeps, like lofty peaks of widely parted ranges, soul greets soul. Separated forever by the limitations of our clay, we live and die absolutely alone. Even Love, the magician, who for dazzling moments gives new sight and boundless revelation, cannot always work his charm. A third of our lives is spent in sleep, and who shall say what proportion of the rest is endured in planetary isolation?

June came through the open windows of the house upon the brink of the cliff and the Master dozed in his chair. The height was glaring, because there were no trees. The spirit of German progress had cut down every one of the lofty pines and maples, save at the edges of the settlement, where primeval woods, sloping down to the valley, still flourished.

Fräulein Fredrika sat with her face resolutely turned to the west. It was Sunday and almost half-past four, but she would not look for the expected guest. She preferred to concentrate her mind upon something else, and when the rusty bell-wire creaked, experience all the emotion of a delightful surprise.

At the appointed hour, he came, and the colour of dead rose petals bloomed on the Fräulein's withered face. "Herr Doctor," she said, "it is most kind. Mine brudder will be pleased."

"Wake up!" cried the Doctor, with a hearty laugh, as he strode into the room. "You can't sleep all the time!"

"So," said the Master, with an understanding smile, as he straightened himself and rubbed his eyes, "it is you!"

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Fräulein Fredrika sat in the corner and watched the two whom she loved best in all the world. No one was so wise as her Franz, unless it might be the Herr Doctor, to whom all the mysteries of life and death were as an open book.

"To me," said the Doctor, once, "much has been given to see. My Father has graciously allowed me to help Him. I am first to welcome the soul that arrives from Him, and I am last to say farewell to those He takes back. What wonder if, now and then, I presume to send Him a message of my faith and my belief?"

The Master's idea of satisfying companionship was not a flow of uninterrupted talk, marred by much levity. He merely asked that his friend should be near at hand, that he might communicate with him when he chose. When he had a thought which seemed worthy of dignified inspection, he would offer it, but not before.

On this particular afternoon, Lynn was exceedingly restless. Like many other men, to whom the thing is impossible, he vaguely feared feminisation. The variety of soft influences continually about him had a subtle, enervating effect.

Iris was reading, his mother was writing letters, and Aunt Peace was endeavouring to entertain him with reminiscences of her early youth. When life lies fair in the distance, with the rosy hues of anticipation transfiguring its rugged steeps and yawning chasms, we are young, though our years may number threescore and ten. On that first day when we look back, either happily or with remorse, to the stony ways over which we have travelled, losing concern for that part of the journey which is yet to come, we have grown old.

"That is very interesting," said Lynn, when Aunt Peace had finished her description of the first school she attended. "I think I'll go out for a walk now, if you don't mind. Will you tell mother, please, when she comes down?"

He went off at a rapid pace and made a long, circling tour of East Lancaster, ending at the bridge, where he, too, leaned over and looked into the sunny depths of the stream. Doctor Brinkerhoff's sign, waving in the wind, gave him an idea. Accidentally, he had hit upon his need; he hungered for the companionship of his kind.

But Doctor Brinkerhoff was not at home,

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and the deserted corridors echoed strangely beneath his tread. He walked the length of the long hall a few times, because there seemed nothing else to do, and the Doctor's cat, locked in the office, mewed piteously.

"Poor pussy!" said Lynn, consolingly, "I wish I could let you out, but I can't."

Up the hill he went, his nameless irritation already sensibly decreased. After all, it was good to be alive—to breathe the free air, feel the warm sun upon his cheek and the springy turf beneath his feet.

"Someone is coming," announced Fräulein Fredrika. "I think it will be the Herr Irving."

"Herr Irving," repeated the Master. "Mine pupil? It is not the day for his lesson."

"Perhaps someone is ill," suggested the Doctor.

But, as it happened, Lynn had no errand save that of pure friendliness. His buoyant spirits immediately gave a freshness to the time-worn themes of conversation, and they talked until sunset.

"It is good to have friends," observed the Master. "In one's wide acquaintance every

person has his own place. You lose one friend, perhaps, and you think, 'Well, I can get along without him,' but it is not so. We have as many sides as we know people, and each acquaintance sees a different one, which is often only a reflection of himself.

"This afternoon, we have been speaking of Truth, and how it is that things entirely opposite each other can both be true. The Herr Doctor says it is because Truth has many sides, but I say no. Truth is one clear white light and we are sun-glasses with many corners. Prisms, I think you say. If the light strikes a sharp edge, it breaks into many colours. To one of us everything will be purple, to another red, and to yet one more it will be all blue. If we have many edges, we see many colours. It is only the person who is in tune, who lets the light pass with no interruption, who sees all things in one harmony, and Truth as it is."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "that is all very true. When we oppose our personal opinion to the thing as it is, and have our minds set upon what should be, according to our ideas, it makes an edge. I think it is the finest art of living to see things as they are

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and make the best of them. There is so little that we can change! If the colours break over us, it is the fault of our sharp edges and not of the light."

"We are getting very serious," observed Lynn. "For my part, I take each day just as it comes."

"One day," repeated the Master. "How many possible things there are in it! What was it the poet said of Herr Columbus? Yes, I have it now. 'One day with life and hope and heart is time enough to find a world.'"

"That is the beauty of it," put in the Doctor. "One day is surely enough. An old lady who had fallen and hurt herself badly said to me once: 'Doctor, how long must I lie here?' 'Have patience, my dear madam,' said I. 'You have only one day at a time to live. Get all the content you can out of it, and let the rest wait, like a bud, till the sun of to-morrow shows you the rose.'"

"Did she get well?" asked Lynn.

"Of course—why not?"

"His sick ones always get well," said Fräulein Fredrika, timidly. "Mine brudder's friend possesses great skill."

She was laying the table for the simple

Sunday night tea, and Lynn said that he must go.

"No, no," objected the Master, "you must stay."

"It would be of a niceness," the Fräulein assured him, very politely.

"We should enjoy it," said the Doctor.

"You are all very kind," returned Lynn, "but they will look for me at home, and I must not disappoint them."

"Then," continued the Doctor, "may I not hope that you will play for me before you go?"

"Certainly, if I have Herr Kaufmann's permission, and if I may borrow one of his violins."

"Of a surety." The Master clattered down the uncarpeted stairs and returned with an instrument of his own make. Without accompaniment, Lynn played, and the Doctor nodded his enthusiastic approval. Herr Kaufmann looked out of the window and paid not the slightest attention to the performance.

"Very fine," said the Doctor. "We have enjoyed it."

"I am glad," replied Lynn, modestly.

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Then, flushed with the praise, and his own pleasure in his achievement, he turned to the Master. "How am I getting on?" he asked, anxiously. "Don't you think I am improving?"

"Yes," returned the Master, dryly; "by next week you will be one Paganini."

Stung by the sarcasm, Lynn went home, and after tea the group resolved itself into its original elements. Herr Kaufmann and the Doctor sat in their respective easy-chairs, conversing with each other by means of silences, with here and there a word of comment, and Fräulein Fredrika was in the corner, silent, too, and yet overcome with admiration.

"That boy," said the Doctor, at length, "he has genius."

The crescent moon gleamed faintly against the sunset, and a wayworn robin, with slow-beating wings, circled toward his nest in one of the maples on the other side of the valley. The fragrant dusk sheltered the little house, which all day had borne the heat of the sun.

"Possibly," said the Master, "but no heart, no feeling. He is all technique."

There was another long pause. "His

mother," observed the Doctor, "do you know her?"

"No. I meet no women but mine sister."

"She is a lovely lady."

"So?"

It was evident that the Master had no interest in Margaret Irving, but the Doctor still brooded upon the vision. She was different from anyone else in East Lancaster, and he admired her very much.

"That boy," said the Doctor, again, "he has her eyes."

"Whose?"

"His mother's."

"So?"

The interval lengthened into an hour, and presently the kitchen clock struck ten. "I shall go now," remarked the Doctor, rising.

"Not yet," said the Master. "Come!"

They went downstairs together, into the shop. It had happened before, though rarely, and the Doctor suspected that he was about to receive the greatest possible kindness from his friend's hands. Herr Kaufmann disappeared into his bedroom and was gone a long time.

The room was dark, and the Doctor did not

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dare to move for fear of stepping upon some of the wood destined for violins. A cricket in the corner sang cheerily and ceased suddenly in the middle of a chirp when the Master came back with a lighted candle.

"One moment, Herr Doctor."

He whisked off again and presently returned, holding under his arm something that was wrapped in many pieces of ragged silk. One by one these were removed, and at last the treasure was revealed.

He held it off at arm's length, where the light might shine upon its beauty, and well out of reach of a random touch. The Doctor said the expected thing, but it fell upon deaf ears. The Master's fine face was alight with more than earthly joy, and he stroked the brown breasts lovingly.

"Mine Cremona!" he breathed. "Mine—all mine!"

VIII

A Bit of Human Driftwood

"PRESENT company excepted," remarked Lynn, "this village is full of fossils."

"At what age does one get to be a 'fossil,'" asked Aunt Peace, her eyes twinkling. "Seventy-five?"

"That is n't fair," Lynn answered, resentfully. "You 're younger than any of us, Aunt Peace,—you 're seventy-five years young."

"So I am," she responded, good humouredly. She was upon excellent terms with this tall, straight young fellow who had brought new life into her household. A March wind, suddenly sweeping through her rooms, would have had much the same effect.

"Am I a fossil?" asked Margaret, who had overheard the conversation.

"You 're nothing but a kid, mother. You 've never grown up. I can do what I

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please with you." He picked her up, bodily, and carried her, flushed and protesting, to her favourite chair, and dumped her into it. "Aunt Peace, is there any place in the house where you might care to go?"

"Thank you, no. I'll stay where I am, if I may. I'm very comfortable."

Lynn paced back and forth with a heavy tread which resounded upon the polished floor. Iris happened to be passing the door and looked in, anxiously, for signs of damage.

"Iris," laughed Miss Field, "what a little old maid you are! You remind me of that story we read together."

"Which story, Aunt Peace?"

"The one in which the over-neat woman married a careless man to reform him. She used to follow him around with a brush and dustpan and sweep up after him."

"That would make him nice and comfortable," observed Lynn. "What became of the man?"

"He was sent to the asylum."

"And the woman?" asked Margaret.

"She died of a broken heart."

"I think I'd be in the asylum too," said

Lynn. "I do not desire to be swept up after."

"Nobody desires to sweep up after you," retorted Iris, "but it has to be done. Otherwise the house would be uninhabitable."

"East Lancaster," continued Lynn, irrelevantly, "is the abode of mummies and fossils. The city seal is a broom—at least it should be. I was never in such a clean place in my life. The exhibits themselves look as though they'd been freshly dusted. Dirt is wholesome—did n't you ever hear that? How the population has lived to its present advanced age, is beyond me."

"We have never really lived," returned Iris, with a touch of sarcasm, "until recently. Before you came, we existed. Now East Lancaster lives."

"Who 's the pious party in brown silk with the irregular dome on her roof?" asked Lynn.

"The minister's second wife," answered Aunt Peace, instantly gathering a personality from the brief description.

"So, as Herr Kaufmann says. Might one inquire about the jewel she wears?"

"It 's just a pin," said Iris.

"It looks more like a glass case. In some-way, it reminds me of a museum."

"It has some of her first husband's hair in it," explained Iris.

"Jerusalem!" cried Lynn, "That's the limit! Fancy the feelings of the happy bride-groom whose wife wears a jewel made out of her first husband's fur! Not for me! When I take the fatal step, it won't be a widow."

"That," remarked Margaret, calmly, "is as it may be. We have the reputation of being a bad lot."

Lynn flushed, patted his mother's hand awkwardly, and hastily beat a retreat. They heard him in the room overhead, walking back and forth, and practising feverishly.

"Margaret," asked Miss Field, suddenly, "what are you going to make of that boy?"

"A good man first," she answered. "After that, what God pleases."

By a swift change, the conversation had become serious, and, always quick at perceiving hidden currents, Iris felt herself in the way. Making an excuse, she left them.

For some time each was occupied with her own thoughts. "Margaret," said Miss Field, again, then hesitated.

"Yes, Aunt Peace—what is it?"

"My little girl. I have been thinking—after I am gone, you know."

"Don't talk so, dear Aunt Peace. We shall have you with us for a long time yet."

"I hope so," returned the old lady, brightly, "but I am not endowed with immortality—at least not here,—and I have already lived more than my allotted threescore and ten. My problem is not a new one—I have had it on my mind for years,—and when you came I thought that perhaps you had come to help me solve it."

"And so I have, if I can."

"My little girl," said Aunt Peace,—and the words were a caress,—"she has given to me infinitely more than I have given to her. I have never ceased to bless the day I found her."

Between these two there were no questions, save the ordinary, meaningless ones which make so large a part of conversation. The deeps were silently passed by; only the shallows were touched.

"You have the right to know," Miss Field continued. "Iris is twenty now, or possibly twenty-one. She has never known when

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her birthday came, and so we celebrate it on the anniversary of the day I found her.

"I was driving through the country, fifteen or twenty miles from East Lancaster. I—I was with Doctor Brinkerhoff," she went on, unwillingly. "He had asked me to go and see a patient of his, in whom, from what he had told me, I had learned to take great interest. Doctor Brinkerhoff," she said, sturdily, "is a gentleman, though he has no social position."

"Yes," replied Margaret, seeing that an answer was expected, "he is a charming gentleman."

"It was a warm Summer day, and on our way back we came upon a dozen or more ragged children, playing in the road. They refused to let us pass, and we could not run over them. A dilapidated farmhouse stood close by, but no one was in sight.

"'Please hold the lines,' said the Doctor. 'I will get out and lead the horse past this most unnecessary obstruction.' When he got out, the children began to throw stones at the horse. It was a young animal, and it started so violently that I was almost thrown from my seat. One child, a girl of ten, climbed

into the buggy and shrieked to the rest: 'I'll hold the lines— get more stones!'

"I was frightened and furiously angry, but I could do nothing, for I had only one hand free. I tried to make the child sit down, and she struck at me. Her torn sleeve fell back, and I saw that her arm was bruised, as if with heavy blows.

"Meanwhile the Doctor had led the horse a little way ahead, and had come back. The whole tribe was behind us, yelling like wild Indians, and we were in the midst of a rain of stones. Doctor Brinkerhoff got in and started the horse at full speed.

"'We 'll put her down,' he said, 'a little farther on. She can walk back.'

"She was quiet, and her head was down, but I had one look from her eyes that haunts me yet. She hated everybody—you could see that,—and yet there was a sort of dumb helplessness about it that made my heart ache.

"She got out, obediently, when we told her to, and stood by the roadside, watching us. 'Doctor,' I said, 'that child is not like the others, and she has been badly used. I want her—I want to take her home with me.'

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"'Bless your kind heart, dear lady,' he replied, laughing, and we were almost at home before I convinced him that I was in earnest. He would not let me go there again, but the very next day, he went, late in the afternoon, and brought her to me after dark, so that no one might see. East Lancaster has always made the most of every morsel of gossip.

"The poor little soul was hungry, frightened, and oh, so dirty! I gave her a bath, cut off her hair, which was matted close to her head, fed her, and put her into a clean bed. The bruises on her body would have brought tears from a stone. I sat by her until she was asleep, and then went down to interview the Doctor, who was reading in the library.

"He said that the people who had her were more than glad to get rid of her, and hoped that they might never see her again. Nothing had been paid toward her support for a long time, and they considered themselves victimised.

"Of course I put detectives at work upon the case and soon found out all there was to know. She was the daughter of a play-act-

ress, whose stage name was Iris Temple. Her husband deserted her a few months after their marriage, and when the child was born, she was absolutely destitute. Finally, she found work, but she could not take the child with her, and so Iris does not remember her mother at all. For six years she paid these people a small sum for the care of the child, then remittances ceased, and abuse began. We learned that she had died in a hospital, but there was no trace of the father.

"There was no one to dispute my title, so I at once made it legal. Shortly afterward, she had a long, terrible fever, and oh, Margaret, the things that poor child said in her delirium! Doctor Brinkerhoff was here night and day, and his skill saved her, but when she came out of it she was a pitiful little ghost. Mercifully, she had forgotten a great deal, but even now some of the horror comes back to her occasionally. She knows everything, except that her mother was a play-actress. I would not want her to know that.

"For a while," Aunt Peace went on, "we both had a very hard time. She was actually depraved. But I believed in the good that was hidden in her somewhere—there is good

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in all of us if we can only find it,—and little by little she learned to love me. Through it all, I had Doctor Brinkerhoff's sympathetic assistance. He came every week, advised me, counselled with me, helped me, and even faced the gossips. All that East Lancaster knows is the simple fact that I found a child who attracted me, discovered that her parents were dead, and adopted her. There was a great deal of excitement at first, but it died down. Most things die down, my dear, if we give them time."

"Dear Aunt Peace," said Margaret, softly, "you found a bit of human driftwood, and with your love and your patience made it into a beautiful woman."

The old face softened, and the serene eyes grew dim. "Whenever I think that my life has been in vain; when it seems empty, purposeless, and bare, I look at my little girl, remember what she was, and find content. I think that a great deal will be forgiven me, because I have done well with her."

"I am so glad you told me," continued Margaret, after a little.

"Her future has sorely troubled me. Of course I can make her comfortable, but money

is not everything. I dread to have her go away from East Lancaster, and yet——"

"She never need go," interrupted Margaret. "If, as you say, the house comes to me, there is no reason why she should. I would be so glad to have her with me!"

"Thank you, my dear! It was what I wanted, but I did not like to ask. Now my mind will be at rest."

"It is little enough to do for you, leaving her out of the question. She might be a great deal less lovely than she is, and yet it would be a pleasure to do it for you."

"She will repay you, I am sure," said Aunt Peace. "Of course Lynn will marry sometime,"—here the mother's heart stopped beating for an instant and went on unevenly, —"so you will be left alone. You cannot expect to keep him in a place like East Lancaster. He is—how old?"

"Twenty-three."

"Then, in a few years more, he will leave you." Aunt Peace was merely meditating aloud as she looked out of the window, and had no idea that she was hurting her listener. "Perhaps, after all, Iris will be my best bequest to you."

"Iris may marry," suggested Mrs. Irving, trying to smile.

"Iris," repeated Aunt Peace, "no indeed! I have made her an old-fashioned spinster like myself. She has never thought of such things, and never will!"

(At the moment, Miss Temple was reading an anonymous letter, much worn, but, though walls have ears, they are happily blind, and Aunt Peace did not realise that she was nowhere near the mark.)

"Marriage is a negative relation," continued Miss Field, with an air of knowledge. "People undertake it from an unpardonable individual curiosity. They see it all around them, and yet they rush in, blindly trusting that their own venture will turn out differently from every other. Someone once said that it was like a crowded church—those outside were endeavouring to get in, and those inside were making violent efforts to get out. Personally, I have had the better part of it. I have my home, my independence, and I have brought up a child. Moreover, I have not been annoyed with a husband."

"Suppose one falls in love," said Margaret, timidly.

"Love!" exclaimed Aunt Peace. "Stuff and nonsense!" She rose majestically, and went out with her head high and the step of a grenadier.

Left to herself, Margaret mentally reviewed their conversation, passing resolutely over the hurt that Aunt Peace had unconsciously made in her heart. Never before had it occurred to her that Lynn might marry. "He can't," she whispered; "why, he's nothing but a child."

She turned her thoughts to Iris and Aunt Peace. The homeless little savage had grown into a charming woman, under the patient care of the only mother she had ever known. If Aunt Peace should die—and if Lynn should marry,—she did not phrase the thought, but she was very conscious of its existence,—she and Iris might make a little home for themselves in the old house. Two men, even the best of friends, can never make a home, but two women, on speaking terms, may do so.

"If Lynn should marry!" Insistently, the torment of it returned. If he should fall in love, who was she to put a barrier in his path? His mother, whose heart had been hungry all these years, should she keep him

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back by so much as a word? Then, all at once, she knew that it was her own warped life which demanded it by way of compensation.

"No," she breathed, with her lips white, "I will never stand in his way. Because I have suffered, he shall not." Then she laughed hysterically. "How ridiculous I am!" she said to herself. "Why, he is nothing but a child!"

The mood passed, and the woman's soul began to dwell upon its precious memories. Mnemosyne, that guardian angel, forever separates the wheat from the chaff, the joy from the pain. At the touch of her hallowed fingers, the heartache takes on a certain calmness, which is none the less beautiful because it is wholly made of tears.

Lynn's violin was silent now, and softly, from the back of the house, the girl's full contralto swelled into a song.

"The hours I spent with thee, Dear Heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me;
I count them over, every one apart—
My rosary! My rosary!"

Iris sang because she was happy, but, none the less, the deep, vibrant voice had an under-

tone of sadness—a world-old sorrow which, by right of inheritance, was hers.

Margaret's thoughts went back to her own girlhood, when she was no older than the unseen singer. Love's cup had been at her lips, then, and had been dashed away by a relentless hand.

"O memories that bless and burn!
O barren pain and bitter loss!
I kiss each bead and strive at last to learn
To kiss the cross—Sweetheart! To kiss the cross!"

"'To kiss the cross,'" muttered Margaret, then the tears came in a blinding flood. "Mother! Mother!" she sobbed. "How could you!"

Insensibly, something was changed, and, for the first time, the woman who had gone to her grave unforgiven, seemed not entirely beyond the reach of pardon.

IX

Rosemary and Mignonette

"SWEET Lady of my Dreams, it cannot be that you are displeased. If you were, I should know, but do not ask me how!

"Day by day, my eyes long for the sight of you; night by night my heart remembers you, for that inner vision does not vanish with the sun. You have unconsciously given me a priceless gift, for wherever I may go, I take you with me—all the grace of you, all the beauty, and all the softness. I have only to close my eyes and then I see.

"But do not think I keep your image always before me, for it is not so. In the work-a-day world, you have no place. You belong, rather, to those fair lands of fancy which lie just beyond the borders of this world and are, or so I think, very near the gleaming gates of Heaven.

"I am not always at work, but sometimes, even when I am, you come tripping before my eyes, so dainty, so wholly exquisite, that I forget what I am doing, and then I must put you aside. But when the day is done, and the light of it shows only through the pinholes pricked in the curtain of night, then I can think of you, as radiant, as beautiful, and as far above me as those very stars.

"All unknowingly, you are the light of my day. Whatever darkness might surround me, your eyes would make it noon. However steep and thorny my path, your hand in mine would make it a sunny meadow, swept by shadowy wings, where the white and crimson clover bloomed all day.

"You give me life. You make the birds sing more sweetly for me; you make the roses more fragrant, the moonlight more like pearl. You have glorified the commonplace affairs of the day with your enchantment; you have put the joy of the gods into the heart of a man.

"Do you wonder that, loving you like this, I do not make myself known? Sweetheart, it is because I fear. Already I have more than I deserve because you are not displeased with

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me, and since I wrote last I have made progress. Would it surprise you very much if I told you I knew where you lived?

"I fancy I see you now, with the scarlet signals flaming on your cheeks, but, Iris, I shall never intrude. It is for you to say whether I shall love you in silence and afar, or face to face, as I dream that some day I may.

"I want you, dear—I want you with all my heart. Of all the women in the world, you are the one God meant for me. Otherwise, why have I been so strangely led to you?

"Since the first day I saw you, I have knelt at your feet. Not for one moment have I forgotten you, so flower-like, so womanly, so dear. So will it always be, whether I live or die. Even to my grave, I shall take the memory of you.

"To-night my memories are few, but my dreams—they are so many that I could not begin to tell you all. But one of them you must know—that some day you will let me tell you how much I love you, and promise me that I may shield you all the rest of your life.

"The wind should never make you cold, the sun should never shine too fiercely upon you, the storm should never beat against you, if I had my way.

"Iris, may I come? Will you let me teach you to care? So sure am I of my love that I ask only for the chance to make you believe.

"Put a flower on your gate-post when the moon rises to-night, if you are willing that I should come. Two flowers, if you are willing that I should come sometime, but not now. Then, when your name-flower embroiders the marshes, you will know who loves you—who worships you—who offers you his all."

That night, when the moon swung high in the heavens, Iris tiptoed out into the garden, with the letter—sentient, alive, and human—crushed close against her heart. So conscious was she of its presence that she felt it blazoned upon her breast for all the world to read.

Dew made the grass damp, but Iris did not care. Threads of silver light picked out a dainty tracery, and here and there set a dew-drop to gleaming like a diamond among

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unnumbered pearls. Drowsy chirps came from the maples above her, where the little birds slept in their swaying nests and dreamed of wild flights at dawn. A great white moth brushed against her face, as softly as thistle-down, and she laughed, because it was so like a kiss.

Down toward her corner of the garden she went, her dimity skirts daintily uplifted. The moonlight touched a cobweb woven across the rose-bush, and made a rainbow of it.

"A little lost rainbow," thought Iris, "out alone in the night, like me!"

She stooped and gathered a sprig of mignonette, then a bit of rosemary from Mrs. Irving's garden. "She won't care," said Iris, to herself; "she used to love somebody, long ago."

She bound the two together with a blade of grass, and put the merest kiss between them, then impulsively wiped it away. But, after all, some trace of it must linger, and Iris did not intend to give too much, so she threw it aside, as it happened, into Lynn's garden. Then she gathered another sprig of mignonette, another leaf of rosemary, bound them together, and held them very far away, out of reach of temptation.

Back toward the gate she went, her heart wildly beating against the imprisoned letter. She hesitated a moment in the shadow of the house. The great white moth had followed her and again touched her face caressingly. Suppose someone should see!

But there was no one in sight. "Anyhow," thought Iris, "if one wishes to come out for a moment in the evening, to walk as far as the gate, it is all right. If there should be rosemary and mignonette on the gate-post in the morning, someone who was up very early might take it away before anybody had seen it. There would be no harm in leaving it there overnight, even though it is n't quite orderly."

She went bravely toward the gate, and the moonbeams made an aureole about her hair. The light of dreams, shining through the mist, transfigured her with silver sheen. The earth was exquisitely still, and the sound of her little feet upon the gravelled path echoed and re-echoed strangely.

Timidly, Iris put the rosemary and mignonette, bound together by a single blade of grass, first upon one gate-post and then upon the other. "Such a little bit!" she mused.

Rosemary and Mignonette

"One could n't call it a flower!" Yes, mignonette was a flower, but rosemary? Surely, no!

She walked backward, slowly, toward the house, and to her conscious eyes, the tell-tale message dominated the landscape. The moonlight fairly made it shine. Almost at the steps, Iris was seized with panic. Then her light feet twinkled down the path, and frightened, trembling, and ashamed, she thrust the nosegay into the open throat of her gown.

"Oh," murmured Iris, as she went hastily into the house, "what could I have been thinking of!"

. . . . . .

But across the street, in the darkness of the shrubbery, Someone smiled.

X

In the Garden

"TO-NIGHT," said Aunt Peace, "we will sit in the garden."

It was Wednesday, and the rites in the house were somewhat relaxed, though Iris, from force of habit, polished the tall silver candlesticks until they shone like new. Miss Field herself made a pan of little cakes, sprinkled them with powdered sugar, and put them away. She was never lovelier than when at her dainty tasks in her spotless kitchen. By some alchemy of the spirit, she made the homely duties of the day into pleasures—simple ones, perhaps, but none the less genuine.

No one alluded to the fact that Doctor Brinkerhoff was coming. "Of course," as Iris said to Lynn, "we don't know that he is, but since he 's missed only one Wednesday in ten years, we may be pardoned for expecting him."

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"One might think so," agreed Lynn, laughing. He took keen delight in the regular Wednesday evening comedy.

"We make the little cakes for tea," continued Iris, her eyes dancing.

"But we never have 'em for tea," Lynn objected, "and I wish you 'd quit talking about 'em. It disturbs my peace of mind."

"Pig!" exclaimed Iris. They were alone, and her face was dangerously near his. Her rosy lips were twitching in a most provoking way, and, immediately, there were Consequences.

She left the print of four firm fingers upon Lynn's cheek, and he rubbed the injured place ruefully. "I don't see why I should n't kiss you," he said.

"If you have n't learned yet, I 'll slap you again."

"No, you won't; I 'll hold your hands next time."

"There is n't going to be any 'next time.' The idea!"

"Iris! Please don't go away! Wait a minute—I want to talk to you."

"It 's too bad it 's so one-sided," remarked Iris, with a sidelong glance.

"Look here!"

"Well, I 'm looking, but so much green—the grass—and the shrubbery, you know—and all—it 's hard on my eyes."

"We 're cousins, are n't we?"

Iris sat down on the bench beside him, evidently struck by a new idea. "I had n't thought of it," she said conversationally. "Are we?"

"I think we are. Mother is Aunt Peace's nephew, is n't she?"

"Not that anybody knows of. A lady nephew is called a niece in East Lancaster."

"Oh, well," replied Lynn, colouring, "you know what I mean. Mother is Aunt Peace's niece, is n't she?"

"I hear so. A gentleman for whom I have much respect assures me of it." The wicked light in her eyes belied her words, and Lynn wished that he had kissed her twice while he had the opportunity.

"It 's the truth," he said. "And mother 's my mother."

"Really?"

"So that makes me Aunt Peace's nephew."

"Grand-nephew," corrected Iris, with double meaning.

"Thank you for the compliment. Perhaps I 'm a nephew-once-removed."

"I have n't seen any signs of removal," observed Iris, "but I 'd love to."

"Don't be so frivolous! If I am Aunt Peace's nephew, what relation am I to her daughter?"

"Legal daughter," Iris suggested.

"Legal daughter is just as good as any other kind of a daughter. That makes me your cousin."

"Legal cousin," explained Iris, "but not moral."

"It 's all the same, even in East Lancaster. I 'm your legal cousin-once-removed."

"Grand-legal-cousin-once-removed," repeated Iris, parrot-like, with her eyes fixed upon a distant robin.

"That 's just the same as a plain cousin."

"You 're plain enough to be a plain cousin," she observed, and the colour deepened upon Lynn's handsome face.

"So I 'm going to kiss you again."

"You 're not," she said, with an air of finality. She flew into the house and took refuge beside Mrs. Irving.

"Mother," cried Lynn, closely following, "is n't Iris my cousin?"

"No, dear; she 's no relation at all."

"So now!" exclaimed Iris, in triumph. "Grand-legal-cousin-once-removed, you will please make your escape immediately."

"Little witch!" thought Lynn, as he went upstairs; "I 'll see that she does n't slap me next time."

"Iris," said Mrs. Irving, suddenly, "you are very beautiful."

"Am I, really?" For a moment the girl's deep eyes were filled with wonder, and then she smiled. "It is because you love me," she said, dropping a tiny kiss upon Margaret's white forehead; "and because I love you, I think you are beautiful, too."

Alone in her room, Iris studied herself in her small mirror. It was just large enough to see one's face in, for Aunt Peace did not believe in cultivating vanity — in others. In her own room was a long pier-glass, where a certain young person stole brief glimpses of herself.

"I 'll go in there," she thought. "Aunt Peace is in the kitchen, and no one will know."

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She left the door open, that she might hear approaching footsteps, and was presently lost in contemplation. She turned her head this way and that, taking pleasure in the gleam of light upon the shining coils of her hair, and in the rosy tint of her cheeks. Just above the corner of her mouth, there was the merest dimple.

Iris smiled, and then poked an inquiring finger into it. "I didn't know I had that," she said to herself, in surprise. "I wonder why I couldn't have a glass like this in my room? There's one in the attic — I know there is, — and oh, how lovely it would be!"

"It's where I kissed you," said Lynn, from the doorway. "If you'll keep still, I'll make another one for you on the other side. You didn't have that dimple yesterday."

"Mr. Irving," replied Iris, with icy calmness, "you will kindly let me pass."

He stepped aside, half afraid of her in this new mood, and she went down the hall to her own room. She shut the door with unmistakable firmness, and Lynn sighed. "Happy mirror!" he thought. "She's the prettiest thing that ever looked into it."

But was she, after all? Since the great

mirror came over-seas, as part of the marriage portion of a bride, many young eyes had sought its shining surface and lingered upon the vision of their own loveliness. Many a woman, day by day, had watched herself grow old, and the mirror had seen tears because of it. The portraits in the hall and the old mirror had shared many a secret together. Happily, neither could betray the other's confidence.

Iris, meanwhile, was finding such satisfaction as she might in the smaller glass, and meditating upon the desirability of the one in the attic. "I'll ask Aunt Peace," she thought, and knew, instantly, that she would n't ask Aunt Peace for worlds.

"I'm vain," she said to herself, reprovingly; "I'm a vain little thing, and I won't look in the mirror any more, so there!"

She reviewed her humdrum round of daily duties with increasing pity for herself. Then, she had had only the books and the people who moved across their eloquent pages, but now? Surely, Cupid had come to East Lancaster.

Just think! Two letters, not so very far apart, from someone who worshipped her at

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a distance and was afraid to sign his name! And this very day, not more than an hour ago, she had been kissed. No man had ever kissed Iris before, not even a grand-legal-cousin-once-removed. Still, she rather wished it had n't happened, for she felt different, someway. It would have been better if the writer of the letters had done it. A romance like this set her far above the commonplace — she felt very much older than Lynn, and was inclined to patronise him. He was nothing but a boy, who chased one around the garden with worms and put grasshoppers in one's hat. Yet one could pardon those things, when one was so undeniably popular.

After tea, they sat in the shadowy coolness of the parlour, waiting. The very air was expectant. Aunt Peace was beautiful in shimmering white, with the emerald gleaming at her throat. Mrs. Irving, as always, wore a black gown, and Iris had donned her best lavender muslin, in honour of the occasion.

"Why can't we go outside?" asked Margaret.

"We can, my dear," returned Aunt Peace,

"but I was taught that it was better to wait in the house until after calling hours. Of course, there are few visitors in East Lancaster, but even on a desert island one must observe the proprieties, and a lady will always receive her guests in the house."

While she was speaking, Doctor Brinkerhoff opened the gate. Miss Field affected not to see him, and waited until the maid ushered him in. "Good evening, Doctor," she said, "I assure you this is quite a pleasure."

His manner toward the others was gentle, and even courtly, but he distinguished Miss Field by elaborate deference. If he disagreed with her, it was with evident respect for her opinion, and upon all disputed points he seemed eager to be convinced.

"Shall we not go into the garden?" asked Aunt Peace, addressing them all. "We were just upon the point of going, Doctor, when you came."

She led the way, with the Doctor beside her, attentive, gallant, and considerate. Margaret came next, with Miss Field's white shawl. Behind were Lynn and Iris, laughing like children at some secret joke. By a

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strange coincidence, five chairs were arranged in a sociable group under the tall pine in a corner of the garden.

"Yes," Miss Field was saying, "I think East Lancaster is most beautiful at this time of year. I have not travelled much, but I have seen pictures, and I am content with my own little corner of the world."

"And yet, madam," returned the Doctor, "you would so much enjoy travelling. It is too bad that you cannot go abroad."

"Perhaps I may. I have not thought of it, but as you speak of it, it seems to me that it might be very pleasant to go."

"Aunt Peace!" exclaimed Mrs. Irving. "What are you thinking of!"

"Not of my seventy-five years, my dear; you may be sure of that."

"Why should n't she go?" asked Lynn. "Aunt Peace could go anywhere and come back safely. Everybody she met would fall in love with her, and see that she was comfortable."

"Quite right!" said the Doctor, with evident sincerity.

"Flatterers!" she laughed. "Fie upon you!" But there was a note of happy youth-

fulness in the voice, and they knew that she was pleased.

"If you go, madam," the Doctor continued, "it will be my pleasure to give you letters to friends of mine in Germany."

"Thank you," she returned, with a stately inclination of her head. "It would be very kind."

"And," he went on, "I have many books which would be of service to you. Shall I bring some of them, the next time I come?"

"I would not trouble you, Doctor, but sometime, if you happened to be passing."

"Yes," he answered, "when I happen to be passing. I shall not forget."

"They might be interesting, if not of actual service. I am familiar with much that has been written of foreign lands. We have *Marco Polo's Adventures* in our library."

The Doctor coughed into his handkerchief. "The world has changed, dear madam, since Marco Polo travelled."

"Yes," she sighed, "it is always changing, and we older ones are left far behind."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Lynn. "I 'll tell you what, Aunt Peace, you 're well up at

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the head of the procession. You 're no farther behind than the drum-major is."

"The drum-major, my dear? I do not understand. Is he a military gentleman?"

"He 's the boss of the whole shooting match," explained Lynn, inelegantly. "He wears a bear-skin bonnet and tickles the music out of the band. If it were n't for him, the whole show would go up in smoke."

"Lynn!" said Margaret, reprovingly. "What language! Aunt Peace cannot understand you!"

"I 'll bet on Aunt Peace," remarked Lynn, sagely.

"I fear I am not quite abreast of the times," said the old lady. "Do you think, Doctor, that the world grows better, or worse?"

"Better, madam, steadily better. I can see it every day."

"It is well for one to think so," observed Margaret, "whatever the facts may be."

Midsummer and moonlight made enchantment in the garden. Merlin himself could have done no more. The house, half hidden in the shadow, stood waiting, as it had done for two centuries, while those who belonged

under its roof made holiday outside. Most of them had gone forever, and only their portraits were left, but, replete with memories both happy and sad, the house could not be said to be alone.

The tall pine threw its gloom far beyond them, and the moonlight touched Aunt Peace caressingly. Her silvered hair gleamed with unearthly beauty and her serene eyes gave sweet significance to her name. All those she cared for were about her — daughter and friends.

"Nights like this," said the Doctor, dreamily, "make one think of the old fairy tales. Elves and witches are not impossible, when the moon shines like this."

Lynn looked across the garden to the rose-bush, where a cobweb, dew-impearled, had captured a bit of wandering rainbow. "They are far from impossible," he answered. "I think they were here only the other night, for in the morning, when I went out to look at my vegetables, I found something queer among the leaves."

"Something queer, my dear?" asked Aunt Peace, with interest. "What was it?"

"A leaf of rosemary and a sprig of mignon-

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ette, tied round with a blade of grass and wet with dew."

"How strange," said Margaret. "How could it have happened?"

"Rosemary," said Aunt Peace, "that means remembrance, and the mignonette means the hope of love. A very pretty message for a fairy to leave among your vegetables."

"Very pretty," repeated the Doctor, nodding appreciation.

Iris feared they heard the loud beating of her heart. "What do you think?" asked Lynn, turning to her. "Was it a fairy?"

"Of course," she returned, with assumed indifference. "Who else?"

There was silence then, and in the house the clock struck ten. They heard it plainly, and the Doctor, with a start of recollection, took out his huge silver watch.

"I had no idea it was so late," he said. "I must go."

"One moment, Doctor," began Miss Field, putting out a restraining hand. "Let me offer you some refreshment before you start upon that long walk. Iris?"

"Yes, Aunt Peace."

"Those little cakes that we had for tea—

there may be one or two left — and is there not a little wine?"

"I'll see."

Lynn followed her, and presently they came back, with the Royal Worcester plate piled generously with cakes, and a decanter of the port that was famous throughout East Lancaster.

With a smile upon her lips, the old lady leaned forward, into the moonlight, glass in hand. The brim of another touched it and the clear ring of crystal seemed carried afar into the night.

"To your good health, madam."

"And to your prosperity."

"This has been very charming," said the Doctor, as he brushed away the crumbs," "and now, my dear Miss Iris, may we not hope for a song?"

"Which one?"

"'Annie Laurie,' if you please."

Iris went in, and Margaret made a move to follow her. "Don't go, mother," said Lynn, "let's stay here."

"I'm afraid Aunt Peace will take cold."

"No, dearie, I have my shawl. Let me be young again, just for to-night, with no fear

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of draughts or colds. Midsummer has never hurt anyone, and, as Doctor Brinkerhoff says, the good fairies are abroad to-night."

The old-fashioned ballad took on new beauty and meaning. Mellowed by the distance, the girl's deep contralto was surpassingly tender and sweet. When she came out, the others were silent, with the spell of her song still upon them.

"A good voice," said Lynn, half to himself. "She should study."

"Iris has had lessons," returned Aunt Peace, with gentle dignity, "and her voice pleases her friends. What is there beyond that?"

"Fame," said Lynn.

"Fame is the love of the many," Aunt Peace rejoined, "and counts for no more than the love of the few. The great ones have said it was barren, and my little girl will be better off here."

As she spoke, she put her arm around Iris, and they went to the house together. At the steps, there was a pause, and Doctor Brinkerhoff said good night.

"It has been perfect," said Miss Field, as she gave him her hand. "If this were to be my last night on earth, I could not ask

for more — my beautiful garden, with the moonlight shining upon it, music, and my best friends."

The Doctor was touched, and bent low over her hand, pressing it ever so lightly with his lips. "I thank you, dear madam," he answered, gently, "for the happiest evening I have ever spent."

"Come again, then," she said, graciously, with a happy little laugh. "The years stretch fair before us, when one is but seventy-five!"

That night, just at the turn of dawn, Margaret was awakened by a hot hand upon her face. "Dearie," said Aunt Peace, weakly, "will you come? I'm almost burning up with fever."

XI

"Sunset and Evening Star"

"Sunset and Evening Star"

DOCTOR BRINKERHOFF came in the morning, but afterward, when Margaret questioned him, he shook his head sadly. "I will do the best I can," he said, "and none of us can do more." He went down the path, bent and old. He seemed to have aged since the previous night.

On Friday, Lynn went to Herr Kaufmann's as usual, but he played carelessly. "Young man," said the Master, "why is it that you study the violin?"

"Why?" repeated Lynn. "Well, why not?"

"It is all the same," returned the Master, frankly. "I can teach you nothing. You have the technique and the good wrist, you read quickly, but you play like one parrot. When I say 'fortissimo,' you play fortissimo; when I say 'allegro,' you play allegro. You

are one obedient pupil,' he continued, making no effort to conceal his scorn.

"What else should I be?" asked Lynn.

"Do not misunderstand," said the Master, more kindly. "You can play the music as it is written. If that satisfies you, well and good, but the great ones have something more. They make the music to talk from one to another, but you express nothing. It is a possibility that you have nothing to express."

Lynn walked back and forth with his hands behind his back, vaguely troubled.

"One moment," the Master went on, "have you ever felt sorry?"

"Sorry for what?"

"Anything."

"Of course—I am often sorry."

"Well," sighed the Master, instantly comprehending, "you are young, and it may yet come, but the sorrows of youth are more sharp than those of age, and there is not much chance. The violin is the most noble of instruments. It is for those who have been sorry to play to those who are. You have nothing to give, but it is one pity to lose your fine technique. Since you wish to amuse,

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change your instrument, and study the banjo, or perhaps the concertina."

Lynn understood no more than if Herr Kaufmann had spoken in a foreign tongue. "I may have to stop for a little while," he said, "for my aunt is ill, and I can't practise."

"Practise here," returned the Master, indifferently. "Fredrika will not care. Or go to the office of mine friend, the Herr Doctor. He will not mind. A fine gentleman, but he has no ear, no taste. Until you acquire the concertina, you may keep on with the violin."

"My mother," began Lynn. "She wants me to be an artist."

"An artist!" repeated the Master, with a bitter laugh. "Your mother —" here he paused and looked keenly into Lynn's eyes. Something was stirred; some far-off memory. "She believes in you, is it not so?"

"Yes, she does — she has always believed in me."

"Well," said the Master, with an indefinable shrug, "we must not disappoint her. You work on like one faithful parrot, and I continue with your instruction. It is good that mothers are so easy to please."

"Herr Kauffmann," pleaded the boy, "tell me. Shall I ever be an artist?"

"Yes, I think so."

"When?"

"When the river flows up hill and the sun rises in the west."

Suddenly, Lynn's face turned white. "I will!" he cried, passionately; "I will! I will be an artist! I tell you, I will!"

"Perhaps," returned the Master. He was apparently unmoved, but afterward, when Lynn had gone, he regretted his harshness. "I may be mistaken," he admitted to himself, grudgingly. "There may be something in the boy, after all. He is young yet, and his mother, she believes in him. Well, we shall see!"

Lynn went home by a long, circuitous route. Far beyond East Lancaster was a stretch of woodland which he had not as yet explored. Herr Kaufmann's words still rang in his ears, and for the first time he doubted himself. He sat down on a rock to think it over. "He said I had the technique," mused Lynn, "but why should I feel sorry?"

After long study, he concluded that the Master was eccentric, as genius is popularly supposed to be, and determined to think no

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more of it. Still, it was not so easily put wholly aside. "You play like one parrot," —that single sentence, like a barbed shaft, had pierced the armour of his self-esteem.

He went on through the woods, and stopped at a pile of rocks near a spring. It might have been an altar erected to the deity of the wood, but for one symbol. On the topmost stone was chiselled a cross.

"Wonder who did it," said Lynn, to himself, "and what for." He found some wild berries, made a cup of leaves, and filled it with the fragrant fruit, planning to take it to Aunt Peace.

But when he reached home Aunt Peace was far beyond the thought of berries. She was delirious, and her ravings were pitiful. Iris was as white as a ghost, and Margaret was sorely troubled.

"Lynn," she said, "don't go away. I need you. Where have you been?"

"To my lesson, and then for a walk. Herr Kaufmann says I may practise there sometimes. He also suggested Doctor Brinkerhoff's."

"That was kind, and I am sure the Doctor will be willing. How does he think you are getting along?"

She asked the question idly, and scarcely expected an answer, but Lynn turned his face away and refused to meet her eyes. "Not very well," he said, in a low tone.

"Why not, dear? You practise enough, don't you?"

"Yes, I think so. He says I have the technique and the good wrist, but I play like a parrot, and can only amuse. He told me to take up the concertina."

Margaret smiled. "That is his way. Just go on, dear, and do the very best you can."

"But I don't want to disappoint you, mother—I want to be an artist."

"Lynn, dear, you will never disappoint me. You have been a comfort to me since the day you were born. What should I have done without you in all these years that I have been alone!"

She drew his tall head down and kissed him, but Lynn, boy-like, evaded the sentiment and turned it into a joke. "That 's very Irish, mother—'what would you have done without me in all the time you 've been alone?' How is the invalid?"

"The fever is high," sighed Margaret, "and Doctor Brinkerhoff looks very grave."

"Sunset and Evening Star"

"I hope she is n't going to die," said Lynn, conventionally. "Can I do anything?"

"No, nothing but wait. Sometimes I think that waiting is the very hardest thing in the world."

That day was like the others. Weeks went by, and still Aunt Peace fought gallantly with her enemy. Doctor Brinkerhoff took up his abode in the great spare chamber and was absent from the house only when there was urgent need of his services elsewhere. He even gave up his Sunday afternoons at Herr Kaufmann's, and Fräulein Fredrika was secretly distressed.

"Fredrika," said the Master, gently, "the suffering ones have need of our friend. We must not be selfish."

"Our friend possesses great skill," replied the Fräulein, with quiet dignity. "Do you think he will forget us, Franz?"

"Forget us? No! Fear not, Fredrika; it is only little loves and little friendships that forget. One does not need those ties which can be broken. The Herr Doctor himself has said that, and of a surety, he knows. Let us be patient and wait."

"To wait," repeated Fredrika; "one finds it difficult, is it not so?"

"Yes," smiled the Master, "but when one has learned to wait patiently, one has learned to live."

Meanwhile, Aunt Peace grew steadily weaker, and the strain was beginning to tell upon all. Doctor Brinkerhoff had lost his youth — he was an old man. Margaret, painfully anxious, found relief from heartache only in unremitting toil. Iris ate very little, slept scarcely at all, and crept about the house like the ghost of her former self. Lynn alone maintained his cheerfulness.

"Iris," said Aunt Peace, one day, "come here."

"I 'm here," said the girl, kneeling beside the bed, and putting her cold hand upon the other's burning cheek, "what can I do?"

"Nothing, dearie. I could get well, I think, were it not for my terrible dreams."

Iris shuddered, and yet was thankful because Aunt Peace could call her delirium "dreams."

"Lately," continued Aunt Peace, "I have been afraid that I am not going to get well."

"Don't!" cried Iris, sharply, turning her face away.

"Dearie, dearie," said the other, caress-

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ingly, "be my brave girl, and let me talk to you. When the dreams come back, I shall not know you, but now I do. I am stronger to-day, and we are alone, are we not? Where are the others?"

"The Doctor has gone to see someone who is very ill. Lynn has taken Mrs. Irving out for a walk."

"I am glad," said Aunt Peace, tenderly. "Margaret has been very good to me. You have all been good to me."

Iris stroked the flushed face softly with her cool hand. In her eyes were love and longing, and a foreshadowed loneliness.

"Dearie," Aunt Peace continued, "listen while I have the strength to speak. All the papers are in a tin box, in the trunk in the attic. There you will find everything that is known of your father and mother. I do not anticipate any need of the information, but it is well that you should know where to find it.

"I have left the house to Margaret," she went on, with difficulty, "for it was rightfully hers, and after her it goes to Lynn, but there is a distinct understanding that it shall be your home while you live, if you choose to claim it. Margaret has promised me to keep

you with her. When Lynn marries, as some day he will, you will be left alone. You and Margaret can make a home together."

The girl's face was hidden in her hands, and her shoulders shook with sobs.

"Don't, dearie," pleaded Aunt Peace, gently; "be my brave girl. Look up at me and smile. Don't, dearie — please don't!

"I have left you enough to make you comfortable," she went on, after a little, "but not enough to be a care to you, nor to make you the prey of fortune hunters. It is, I think, securely invested, and you will have the income while you live. Some few keepsakes are yours, also — they are written down in" — here she hesitated — "in a paper Doctor Brinkerhoff has. He has been very good to us, dearie. He is almost your foster-father, for he was with me when I found you. He is a gentleman," she said, with something of her old spirit, "though he has no social position."

"Social position is not much, Aunt Peace, beside the things that really count, do you think it is?"

"I hardly know, dearie, but I have changed my mind about a great many things since I

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have lain here. I was never ill before — in all my seventy-five years, I have never been ill more than a day at a time, and it seems very hard."

"It is hard, Aunt Peace, but we hope you will soon be well."

"No, dearie," she answered, "I 'm afraid not. But do not let us borrow trouble, and let me tell you something to remember. When you have the heartache, dearie," — here the old eyes looked trustfully into the younger ones, — "don't forget that you made me happy. You have filled my days with sunshine, and, more than anything else, you have kept me young. I know you thought me harsh at first, but now, I am sure you understand. You have been my own dear daughter, Iris. If you had been my own flesh and blood, you could not have been more to me than you have."

Margaret came in, and Iris went away, sobbing bitterly. Aunt Peace sighed heavily. Her cheeks were scarlet, and her eyes burned like stars.

"I 'm afraid you 've tired yourself," said Margaret, softly. "Was I gone too long?"

"No, indeed! Iris has been with me, and I am better to-day."

"Try to sleep," said Margaret, soothingly.

Obediently, Aunt Peace closed her eyes, but presently she sat up. "I 'm so warm," she said, fretfully. "Where is Doctor Brinkerhoff?"

"He has not come yet, but I think he will be here soon."

"Margaret?"

"Yes, Aunt Peace."

"Will you write off the recipe for those little cakes for him? He may be able to find someone to make them for him, though of course they will not be the same."

"Yes, I will."

"It 's in my book. They are called 'Doctor Brinkerhoff's cakes.' You will not forget?"

"No, I won't forget. Can't you sleep now?"

"I 'll try."

Presently, the deep regular breathing told that she was asleep. Iris came back with her eyes swollen and Margaret took her out into the hall. They sat there for a long time, hand in hand, waiting, but no sound came from the other room.

"I cannot bear it," moaned Iris, her mouth

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quivering. "I cannot bear to have Aunt Peace die."

"Life has many meanings," said Margaret, "but it is what we make it, after all. The pendulum swings from daylight to darkness, from sun to storm, but the balance is always true."

Iris leaned against her, insensibly comforted.

"She would be the first to tell you not to grieve," Margaret went on, though her voice faltered, "and still, we need sorrow as the world needs night. We cannot always live in the sun. We can take what comes to us bravely, as gentlewomen should, but we must take it, dear — there is no other way."

Long afterward, Iris remembered the look on Margaret's face as she said it, but the tears blinded her just then.

Doctor Brinkerhoff came back at twilight, anxious and worn, yet eager to do his share. Through the night he watched with her, alert, capable, and unselfish, putting aside his personal grief for the sake of the others.

In the last days, those two had grown very near together. When the dreams came, he held her in his arms until the tempest passed, and afterwards, soothed her to sleep.

"Doctor," she said one day, "I have been thinking a great deal while I have lain here. I seem never to have had the time before. I think it is well, at the end, to have a little space of calm, for one sees so much more clearly."

"You have always seen clearly, dear lady," said the Doctor, very gently.

"Not always," she answered, shaking her head. "I can see many a mistake now. The fogs have sometimes gathered thick about me, but now they have lifted forever. We are but ships on the sea of life," she went on. "My course has lain through calm waters, for the most part, with the skies blue and fair above me. I have been sheltered, and I can see now that it might have made me stronger and better to face some of the storms. Still, my Captain knows, and now, when I can hear the breakers booming on the reef where I am to strike my colours, I am not afraid."

The end came on Sunday, just at sunset, while the bells were tolling for the vesper service. The crescent moon rocked idly in the west, and a star glimmered faintly above it.

"Sunset and Evening Star"

"Sunset and evening star," she repeated, softly. "And one clear call for me. Will you say the rest of it?"

Choking, Doctor Brinkerhoff went on with the poem until he reached the last verse, when he could speak no more.

> "For though from out our bourne of time and place
> The flood may bear me far,
> I hope to meet my Pilot face to face
> When I have crossed the bar."

She finished it, then turned to him with her face illumined. "It is beautiful," she said, "is it not, my friend?"

Twilight came, and Margaret found them there when she went in with a lighted candle. The Doctor sat at the side of the bed, very stiff and straight, with the tears streaming over his wrinkled face. On his shoulder, like a tired child, lay Aunt Peace, who had put on, at last, her Necklace of Perfect Joy.

XII

The False Line

UP in the darkened chamber where Aunt Peace lay, Iris stood face to face with the greatest sorrow of her life. Was this, then, the end? Was there nothing more? Cold as snow, unpitying as marble, Death mocked Iris as she stood there, mutely questioning. Timidly she touched the waxen cheek. The crimson fires burned there no more—the fever was gone.

Through the house resounded the steady tread of muffled feet. Of all the horrors of Death, the worst is that seemingly endless procession who come to offer "sympathy," to ask if there is anything they can do. Mere acquaintances, privileged only by a casual nod, break down all barriers when the Conqueror comes. Is it that idle curiosity which occasionally dominates the best of us, or is it Life, triumphant for the moment, looking forward fearfully to its inevitable end?

The False Line

Some "friend of the family," high in its confidence, assumes the responsibility at such times. Chance callers are rewarded with grisly details and grewsome descriptions of the soul struggling to free itself from its bonds. We are told how the others "took it," when at last the sail was spread for the voyage over the uncharted sea.

In the hall, straight as a soldier under orders, stood Doctor Brinkerhoff. "No, madam," he would say, "there is nothing you can do. The arrangements are made. I will tell Mrs. Irving and Miss Temple that you called. Yes, we were expecting it. She died peacefully; there was no pain. To-morrow at four."

And then again: "Thank you, there is nothing you can do, but it is kind of you to offer. The ladies will be grateful for your sympathy. Who shall I say called?"

"Iris," pleaded Margaret, "come away."

The girl started. "I can't," she answered, dully.

"You must come, dear—come into my room."

Unwillingly, Iris suffered herself to be led away. It is only the surface emotion which is relieved by tears. Within the prison-house

of the soul, when Grief, clad in grey garments, enters silently and prepares to remain, there is no weeping. One hides it, as the Spartan covered the bleeding wound in his breast.

"Dear," said Margaret, "my heart aches for you."

"She was all I had," whispered Iris.

"But not all you have. Lynn and I, and Doctor Brinkerhoff — surely we are something."

"Did you ever care?" asked Iris, her despairing eyes fixed upon Margaret.

The older woman shrank from the question. She was tempted to dissemble, but one tells the truth in the presence of Death.

"Not as you care," she answered. "My mother broke my heart. She took me away from the man I loved, and forced me to marry another, whom I only respected. When my husband died, I had my freedom, but it came too late. When my mother died—she died unforgiven."

"Then you don't understand."

"Yes, dear, I understand. You must remember that I loved her too."

"Suppose it had been Lynn?"

The False Line

"Lynn!" cried Margaret, with her lips white. "Lynn! Dear God, no!"

Iris laughed hysterically. "You do not understand," she said, with forced calmness, "but you would if it were Lynn. You would not let me keep you away if it were Lynn instead of Aunt Peace, so please do not disturb me again."

Back she went, into the darkened chamber, and closed the door.

Lynn walked back and forth through the halls aimlessly. All along, he had felt the repulsion of the healthy young animal for the aged and ill. Now he was unmoved, save by the dank, sweet smell of the house of death. It grated on his sensibilities and made him shudder. He wished that it was over.

From his mother, he felt a curious alienation. Her eyes were red, and, man-like, Lynn hated tears. From Doctor Brinkerhoff, too, a gulf divided him.

His fingers itched for his violin, but he could not practise. It would not disturb Aunt Peace, but it would be considered out of keeping with the situation. The Doctor's rooms over the post-office were also impossible.

He smiled at the thought of the gossip which would permeate East Lancaster if he should practise there.

But at Herr Kaufmann's? His face brightened, and with characteristic impulsiveness he hastened downstairs.

Doctor Brinkerhoff still stood in the hall, a little wearily, perhaps, but calmness overlaid his features like a mask. Lynn wondered at the change in him.

"Mr. Irving," he said, huskily, "you were going out?"

"Yes," replied Lynn, "to Herr Kaufmann's. I can do nothing here," he added, by way of apology.

"No," sighed the Doctor, "no one can do anything here, but wait one moment."

"Yes?" responded Lynn, with a rising inflection. "Is there some message?"

"It is my message," said the Doctor, with dignity. "Say to him, please, that no provision has been made for music to-morrow, and that I would like him to come. Be sure to say that I ask it."

"Very well."

Lynn moved away from the house decorously, though the freedom of the outer air

The False Line

and the spring of the turf beneath his feet lifted the cloud from his spirits and urged him to hasten his steps.

Doctor Brinkerhoff looked after him, his old eyes dim. The impassable chasm of the years lay between him and Lynn — a measureless gulf which no trick of magic might span. "If I had it to do over," said the Doctor, to himself,— "if I had my lost youth — and was not afraid,— things would not be as they are now."

Margaret saw him from her upper window, and something tightened round her heart, as though some iron hand held it unpityingly. Then came a great throb of relief, because it was Aunt Peace, instead of Lynn.

Iris, too, had seen him as he left the house. She perceived that he was eager to get away — that only a sense of the fitness of things kept him from running and whistling as was his wont. From the first, she had known that it was nothing to him. "He has no heart," she said to herself. "He is as cold as — as cold as Aunt Peace is now."

Slow torture held the girl in a remorseless gird. Dimly, she knew that some day there would be a change — that it could not always

be like this. Sometime it must ease, and each throb would be sensibly less of a hurt — just a little easier to bear. With rare prescience, also, she knew that nothing in the world would ever be the same again — that she had come to the dividing line. One reaches it as a light-hearted child; one crosses it — a woman.

"No," said the Doctor, for the fiftieth time, "there is nothing you can do. Mrs. Irving and Miss Temple are not receiving. Yes, we expected it. The end was very peaceful and she did not suffer at all. Yes, it is surely a comfort to know that. The arrangements are all made. Yes, thank you, we have the music provided for. It was kind of you to come, and the ladies will be grateful for your sympathy. Who shall I say called?"

Behind him were the portraits, ranged in orderly rows. Some were old and others young, but all had gone the way that Peace should go to-morrow. Dumbly, the Doctor wondered if the same remorseless questioning had gone on every time there had been a death in the old house, and, if so, why the very floors did not cry out in protest at the desecration.

The False Line

Life, that mystery of mysteries! The silence at the end and the beginning is far easier to understand than the rainbow that arches between. Man, the epitome of his forbears, — more than that, the epitome of creation, — stands by himself — the riddle of the universe.

The house in some way seemed alive, in pitiful contrast to its mistress, who lay upstairs, spending her last night in the virginal whiteness of her chamber. To-night there, and to-morrow night ——

Doctor Brinkerhoff, unable to bear the thought, recoiled as if from an unexpected blow. Was it fancy, or did the painted lips of the young officer in the uniform of the Colonies part in an ironical smile?

"So," said the Master, as he opened the door, "you are late to your lesson."

"It is my lesson day, is n't it?" returned Lynn. "But I have only come to practise. My aunt is dead."

"So? Your aunt?"

"Yes, Aunt Peace. Miss Field, you know," he continued, in explanation.

"So? I did not know. When was it?"

"Sunday afternoon."

"And this is Tuesday. Well, we hear very little up here. It is too bad."

"Yes," agreed Lynn, awkwardly, "It — it upsets things."

The Master looked at him narrowly. "So it does. For instance, you have lost one lesson on account of it, but you can practise. Come down in mine shop where I am finishing mine violin. You shall play your concerto. It is not a necessity to lose the practise for death."

"That's what I thought," said Lynn, as they went downstairs. "She was very old, you know — more than seventy-five. There is a great deal of fuss made about such things."

Again the Master looked at him sharply, but Lynn was unconscious and perfectly sincere. He was not touched at all.

"You can have one of mine violins," the Master resumed, "and I shall finish the one upon which I am at work. The concerto, please."

At once Lynn began, walking back and forth restlessly as he played. He had long since memorised the composition, and when he finished the first movement he paused to tighten a string.

The False Line

"You," said the Master,— "you have studied composition?"

"Only a little."

"You feel no gift in that line?"

"No, not at all."

"It is only to play?"

"Yes, for the present."

"Then," said the Master, changing the position of the bridge on the violin in his hand, "if you have no talents for composition, why do you not let the composer of your concerto have his own way? You should not correct him — it is most impolite."

"What — what do you mean?" stammered Lynn.

"Nothing," said the Master, "only, if you have no gifts, you should play G sharp where it is written, instead of G natural. It is not what one might call an improvement in the concerto."

Lynn flushed, and began to play the movement over again, but before he reached the bar in question he had forgotten. When he came to it he played G natural again, and instantly perceived his mistake.

The Master laughed. "Genius," he said, "must have its own way. It is not to be

held down by the written score. It must make changes, flourishes, improvements. It is one pity that the composer cannot know."

"I forgot," temporised Lynn.

"So? Then why not take up the parlour organ? You should have an instrument on which the notes are all made. I should not advise the banjo, or even the concertina. The organ that turns by the handle would be better yet. To make the notes — that is most difficult, is it not so? Now, then, the adagio. Let us see how much you can better that."

Lynn played it correctly, and with intelligence, but without feeling.

"One moment," said the Master. "There is something I do not understand. That adagio is one of the most beautiful things ever written. It is full of one heartache and has in it many tears. Your aunt, you say, lies dead in your house, and yet you play it like one machine. I cannot see! Perhaps you had quarrelled?"

"No," returned Lynn, in astonishment, "I was very, very fond of her."

There was a long silence, then the Master sighed. "The thing means more than the

The False Line

person," he said. "Whoever is dead, if it is only one little bird, it should make you feel sad. But it waits. Before you have finished, the world will do one of three things to you. It will make your heart very soft, very hard, or else break it, so. No one escapes."

"By the way," began Lynn, eager to change the subject, "Doctor Brinkerhoff told me to ask you to come and play at the funeral to-morrow at four o'clock. He said it was his wish."

The Master's face was troubled. "Once," he said, "I promised one very angry lady that I would not go in that house again, and I have kept mine word. It was only once I went, but that was too much. Still, it was twenty-five years and more past, and she has long since been dead. Death frees one from a promise, is it not so?"

"Of course," replied Lynn, vaguely.

"At any rate, mine friend, the Herr Doctor, has asked it, even after he has known of mine promise, and, of a surety, he is wiser than I. I will come, at four, with mine violin."

Lynn took the long way home, his sunny nature deeply disturbed. "What is it?" he vainly asked of himself. "Am I different

from everybody else? They all seem to know something that I do not."

Iris kept her long vigil by Aunt Peace, her grief too great for her starved body to withstand. At the sound of a fall, Doctor Brinkerhoff left his post and hurried upstairs. Margaret was there almost as soon as he was. Iris had fainted.

Together, they carried her into her own room, where at length she revived. "What happened?" she asked, weakly. "Did I fall?"

"Hush, dear," said Margaret. "Lie still. I 'm coming to sit with you after a while."

She went out into the hall to speak to the Doctor, but he was not there. By instinct, she knew where to find him, and went into the front room.

He stood with his back to the door, looking down upon that marble face. Margaret was beside him, before he knew of her presence, and when he turned, for once off his guard, she read his secret.

"She never knew," he said, briefly, as though in explanation. "I never dared to tell her. Sometimes I think the lines we draw are false ones — that God knows best."

The False Line

"Yes," replied Margaret, unsteadily, "the lines are false, but it is always too late when we find it out."

"Yet a part of the barrier was of His own making. She was infinitely above me. I should have been her slave; I was never meant to be her equal. Still, the thirsty heart will aspire to the waters beyond its reach."

"She knows now," said Margaret.

"Yes, she knows now, and she pardons me for my presumption. I can read it in her face as I stand here."

Margaret choked back a sob. "Come away," she said, with her hand upon his arm, "come away until to-morrow."

"Until to-morrow," he repeated, softly. He closed the door quietly, as though he feared the sound might break her sleep.

Iris was resting, and Margaret tiptoed down into the parlour, where the Doctor sat with his grey head bowed upon his hands. "She knows it now," he said again, "and she forgives me. I can feel it in my heart."

"If she had known it before," said Margaret, "things would have been different," but she knew that what she said was untrue.

"No," he returned, shaking his head, "the line was there. You would not know what it is like unless there had been a line between you and the one you loved."

"There was," she answered, hoarsely, then her eyes met his.

"You, too?" he asked, unbelieving, but she could not speak. She only bowed her head in assent. Then his hand grasped hers in full understanding. The false line divided them, also, but in one thing, at least, they were kindred.

"I wish," said the Doctor, after a little, "that we could hide her away before to-morrow. The people she has held herself apart from all her life will come and look at her now that she is helpless."

"That is the irony of it," returned Margaret. "I have even prayed to outlive those I hated, so that they could not come and look at me when I was dead."

"Have you outlived them?"

"Yes," answered Margaret, thickly, "every one."

"You hated someone who drew the false line?"

"Yes."

The False Line

"And that person is dead?"

"Yes."

"Then," said the Doctor, very gently, "when you have forgiven, the line will be blotted out. The one on the other side of it may be out of your reach forever, but the line will be gone."

The idea was new to her, that she must forgive. She thought of it long afterward, when the house was as quiet as its sleeping mistress, and the pale stars faded to pearl at the hour of dawn.

The third day came; the end of that pitiful period in which we wait, blindly hoping that the miracle of resurrection may be given once more, and the stone be rolled away from our dead.

It was Doctor Brinkerhoff who had the casket closed before the strangers came, and afterward he told Margaret. "She would be thankful," Margaret assured him, and his eyes filled. "Yes," he answered, huskily, "I believe she would."

They sat together at the head of the stairs, out of sight, and yet within hearing. Lynn sat at one end, still perplexed, and shuddering at the unpleasantness of it all. His mother's

hand was in his, and with her left arm she supported Iris, who leaned heavily against her shoulder, broken-hearted. On the other side of Iris was Doctor Brinkerhoff, austere and alone.

From below came the wonderful words of the burial service: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." It was followed by a beautiful tribute to Aunt Peace — to the countless good deeds of her five and seventy years.

Then there was silence, broken by the muffled sound of a string being tightened to harmonise with the piano. Swiftly upon the discordant note, the voice of a violin, strong, clear, and surpassingly sweet, rose in an *Ave Maria*.

Margaret started to her feet. "What is it?" she whispered, hoarsely.

"Mother," said Lynn, in a low tone, "don't. It is only Herr Kaufmann. We asked him to play."

"The Cremona!" she muttered. "The Cremona — here — to-day!"

She lay back in her chair with her eyes closed and her mouth quivering. Lynn held

The False Line

her hand tightly, and Iris breathed hard. Doctor Brinkerhoff listened intently, his heart rejoicing in the beauty of it, because it was done for her.

Deep chords, full and splendid, sounded an ultimate triumph over Death. The music counselled acceptance, resignation, because of something that lay beyond — indefinite, yet complete restitution, when the time of its fulfilment should be at hand. Beside it, the individual grief sank into insignificance — it was the sorrow of the world demanding payment for itself from the world's joy.

Something vast and appealing took the place of the finite passion, seeking hungrily for its own ends, and in the greatness of it, with heart uplifted, Margaret forgave the dead.

XIII

To Iris

"DAUGHTER of the Marshes, the winds have told me you are sad. If I could, I would bear it for you, but there is no way by which one of us may take another's burden.

"I wish I might come to you, but now, when you are troubled, I will not ask you for a signal, even for a flower on the gate-post. I would always have you happy, dear, if my love could buy it from the Fates — those deep eyes of yours should never be veiled by the mist of tears.

"Do you know where the marsh is, Iris? You have lived in East Lancaster for many years, so the gossips tell me, yet I doubt whether you could find it unless someone showed you the way. To reach it, you must follow the river, through all its turns and windings, for many a weary mile.

To Iris

"Up in those distant hills, so far that I have never found it, the river begins — perhaps in some tiny pool of crystal clearness. It sings along over its rocky bed until it reaches a low, sandy plain, and here is the marsh. I was there the other day, just at sunset; my heart thrilled with the beauty of it because it is the beauty of you.

"How shall I tell you of the wonder of the marshes, those wide, watery plains embroidered with strange bloom? Tall, slender rushes stand there, bending gracefully when the wind passes, and answering with music to the touch. Have you ever heard the song of the marshes when the wind moves through the rushes and plays upon them like strings? Some day, I will take you there, and you shall listen, too, and tell me what you think it means.

"Here and there are pools, set like jewels among the rushes, with never a hint of growth. Sometimes you see a wide sweep of grass, starred with tiny yellow flowers, or a lily, surrounded by its leaves, drinking in the loveliness of the day and forgetting all the maze of slime and dark water through which it has somehow come. I think our souls are like that, Iris — we grow through

the world, with all its darkness, borne upward by unfailing aspiration, until we reach the end, which we have been taught to call Heaven, but which is only blossoming in the light.

"But of all the radiant beauty of marshes, the best is this — that part of it which bears the purple flower of your name. In and out of the rushes, like the thread of a strange tapestry, it winds and wanders, hidden for an instant, maybe, but never lost. I have gathered an armful of the blossoms, and put my face down to them, closing my eyes, and dreaming that it was you — you whom I must ever hold apart as something too beautiful for me to touch — you, whom I can only love from afar.

"I have told you that I would come when the iris bloomed, but now, when the marsh is glorious with the purple banners, I dare not. It is not only because you are sad, though not for worlds would I trouble you now, but because I am afraid.

"Only in my wildest moments do I dare to hope — you were never meant for such as I. By day, I bow my soul before you in shame at my own unworthiness, but at night,

To Iris

like some flaming star which speeds across the uncharted dark, you light the barren country of my dreams.

"I think sometimes that I shall never dare to tell you; that it must be like this, year after year. If you knew your lover, who is so bold and yet so fearful, I think you would cast him aside in scorn. So it is better for me to believe, though that belief has no foundation,—better for me to hope than utterly to despair. Without you, I dare not think what life might be.

"Like the marsh, the years stretch out before me—a vast plain of which the uncertainty only is sure. They are full of strange pitfalls, of unsounded deeps and silences, of impassable barriers which I, disheartened and doubting, must one day meet face to face.

"Night lies upon it, and I cannot see the way. Storm beats upon me and turns me from my course. The clouded day ends in sunset, and the crystal pools, by which I thought to mark my path, become beacons of blood-red flame.

"The will o' the wisp leads me into the mire, where the rushes cling tightly about me and keep me back. But the night wind

blows from the east, where the dawn sleeps, and on the strings of the marsh grass breathes a little song. 'Iris! Iris!' it sings, then all at once my sore heart grows strangely glad, for whatever may come to me, I shall have the memory of you.

"Like the flags that glorify the marshes and spread their elfin sweetness afar, you shine upon the desert wastes of my life. I can never wholly lose you — you are there for always, and graven on my heart forever is the symbol of the fleur-de-lis."

XIV

Her Name-Flower

SOMEHOW, the days passed. Iris ate mechanically, and went about her household duties with her former precision. On Wednesday evening, Doctor Brinkerhoff came, as usual, and Margaret's eyes filled at the sight of him.

Bent, old, and haggard, he came up the path, longing for his accustomed place in the house, and yet dreading to take it. Iris met him with a pitiful little smile, and he bowed over her hand for a moment, his shoulders shaking. Then he straightened himself, like a soldier under fire.

"Miss Iris," he said, "we are bound together by a common grief. More than that, I have a trust to fulfil. She" — here he hesitated and then went on — "she asked me if I would not try to take the place of a father to you, and I promised that I would."

"I have always felt so toward you," answered Iris, in a low tone.

Lynn was quite himself again, and his cheerful talk enlivened the others, almost against their will. There was laughter and to spare, yet beneath it was an undercurrent of sorrow, for the wound was healed only upon the surface.

"It is hard," said the Doctor, sadly, "but life holds many hard things for all of us. Perhaps, if we lived rightly, if our faith were stronger, death would not rend our hearts as it does. It is the common lot, the universal leveller, and soon or late it comes to us all. It remains to make our spiritual adjustment accord with the inevitable fact. There is so little that we can change, that it behooves us to confine our efforts to ourselves."

"Life," replied Lynn "is the pitch of the orchestra, and we are the instruments."

Doctor Brinkerhoff nodded. "Very true. The discord and the broken string of the individual instrument do not affect the whole, except as false notes, but I think that God, knowing all things, must discern the symphony, glorious with meaning, through the discordant fragments that we play."

Her Name a Flower

So the talk went on, Lynn taking the burden of it and endeavouring always to make it cheerful. Margaret understood and loved him for it, but she, too, was sad. Iris sat like a stone, waiting, counting off the leaden hours as something to be endured, and blindly believing that rest would come.

"Everything," said Margaret, after a long silence, "was as beautiful as it could be."

Doctor Brinkerhoff understood at once. "Yes," he sighed, "and I am glad. I think it was as she would have wished it to be, and I am sure she was pleased because I shielded her from the gaze of the curious at the end." His face worked as he said it, but he took a pitiful pride in what he had done. Day by day he hugged this last service closer, because it was done through his own thought and his own understanding, and would have pleased her if she had known.

"Yes," returned Margaret, kindly, "it was very thoughtful of you. It would never have occurred to me, and I know she would have been grateful."

"Miss Iris?" said the Doctor, inquiringly.

The girl turned. "Yes?"

"She — she gave me a paper for you.

Will you have it, or shall I read it to you?"

"Read it," answered Iris, dully.

"It is in the form of a letter. She wrote it one day, near the end of her illness, and gave it to me, to be opened after her death."

In the midst of a profound silence, he took an envelope from his pocket and broke the seal.

"'My Dear Doctor Brinkerhoff,'" he began, clearing his throat, "'I feel that I am not going to get well, and so I have been thinking, as I lie here, and setting my house in order. I have told Iris, but for fear she may forget, I tell you. All the papers which concern her are in a tin box in a trunk in the attic. She will know where to find it.

"'To her, as to an only daughter, go my little keepsakes — the emerald pin, my few pieces of real lace, my fan, and the silver buckles. She will understand the spirit of this bequest and will feel free to take what she likes.

"'The house is for Margaret, and, after her, for Lynn, but it is to be a home for Iris, just as it has been, while she lives. Her income is to be paid regularly on the first of every month, during her lifetime, as is written in

Her Name-Flower

my will, which the lawyer has and which he will read at the proper time.

"'Tell my little girl that, though I am dead, I love her still; that she has given me more than I could ever have given her, and that she must be my brave girl and not grieve. Tell her I want her to be happy.

"'To you, I send my parting salutations. I have appreciated your friendship and your professional skill.

"'With assurances of my deep personal esteem,

"'Your Friend,

"'PEACE FIELD.'"

Iris broke down and left the room, weeping bitterly. Margaret followed her, but the girl pushed her aside. "No," she whispered, "go back. It is better for me to be alone."

"I am sorry," said the Doctor, breaking the painful hush; "perhaps I should have waited. I very much regret having given Miss Iris unnecessary pain."

"It is as well now as at any other time," Margaret assured him, "but my heart bleeds for her."

The clock on the landing struck ten, and

Margaret excused herself for a moment. She returned with the Royal Worcester plate, piled with cakes, and a decanter of the port.

"I made them," she said, in a low tone; "she asked me to give you the recipe."

"She was always thoughtful of others," returned the Doctor, choking.

He filled his glass, and from force of habit, offered it to an invisible friend. "To your —" then he stopped.

"To her memory," sobbed Margaret, touching his glass with hers.

They drank the toast in silence, then the Doctor staggered to his feet.

"I can bear no more," he said, unsteadily; "it is a communion service with the dead."

"Lynn," said Margaret, after the guest had gone, "I am troubled about Iris. She is grieving herself to death, and it is not natural for the young to suffer acutely for so long. Can you suggest anything?"

"No," answered Lynn, anxious in his turn, "except to get outdoors. I don't believe she 's been out since Aunt Peace was buried."

"You must take her, then."

"Do you think she would go with me?"

Her Name a Flower

"I don't know, dear, but try it — try it to-morrow. Take her for a long walk and get her so tired that she will sleep. Nothing rests the mind like fatigue of the body."

"Mother," began Lynn, after a little, "are we always going to stay in East Lancaster?"

"I have n't thought about it at all, Lynn. Are you becoming discontented?"

"No — I was only looking ahead."

"This is our home — Aunt Peace has given it to us."

"It was ours anyway, was n't it?"

"In a way, it was, but your grandfather left it to Aunt Peace. If he had not died suddenly he would have changed his will. Mother said he intended to, but he kept putting it off."

"Do you want me to keep on studying the violin?"

Margaret looked up in surprise, but Lynn was pacing back and forth with his hands clasped behind him and his head down.

"Why not, dear?" she asked, very gently.

"Well," he sighed, "I don't believe I 'm ever going to make anything of it. Of course I can play — Herr Kaufmann says, if it satisfies

me to play the music as it is written, he can teach me that much, but he has n't a very good opinion of me. I 'd rather be a first-class carpenter than a second-rate violinist, and I 'm twenty-three — it 's time I was choosing."

Margaret's heart misgave her, but she spoke bravely. "Lynn, look at me."

He turned, and his eyes met hers, openly and unashamed.

"Tell me the truth — do you want to be an artist?"

"Mother, I 'd rather be an artist than anything else in the world."

"Then, dear, keep at it, and don't get discouraged. Somebody said once that the only reason for a failure was that the desire to succeed was not strong enough."

Lynn laughed mirthlessly. "If that is so," he said, moodily, "I shall not fail."

"No," she answered, "you shall not fail. I won't let you fail," she added, impulsively. "I know you and I believe in you."

"The worst of it," Lynn went on, "would be to disappoint you."

Margaret drew his tall head down and rubbed her cheek against his. "You could

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not disappoint me," she said, serenely, "for all I ask of you is your best. Give me that, and I am satisfied."

"You 've always had that, mother," he returned, with a forced laugh. "When you strike a snag, I suppose the only thing to do is to drive on, so we 'll let it go at that. I 'll keep on, and do the best I can. If worst comes to worst, I can play in a theatre orchestra."

"Don't!" cried Margaret; "you 'll never have to do that!"

"Well," sighed Lynn, "you can never tell what 's coming, and in the meantime it 's almost twelve o'clock."

With the happy faculty of youth, Lynn was asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. Iris lay with her eyes wide open, staring into the dark, inert and helpless under the influence of that anodyne which comes at the end of a hurt, simply through lack of the power to suffer more. The three letters under her pillow brought a certain sense of comfort. In the midst of the darkness which surrounded her, someone knew, someone understood—loved her, and was content to wait.

Margaret was troubled because of Lynn's

disbelief in himself. His sunny self-confidence was apparently put to rout by this new phase. Then she remembered that they had all passed through a time of stress, that Lynn, strong and self-reliant as he had been, must have felt it, too, and, moreover, the artistic temperament in itself was inclined to various eccentricities.

Of his future, she never for one moment had any doubt. It was her heart's desire that Lynn should be an artist. Looking back upon her life and upon all that she had suffered, she saw this one boon as full compensation — as her just due. If this bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh might wear the laurel crown of the great, she would be content — would not begrudge the price which she had paid for it.

She smiled ironically at the thought that, while credit was given to some, she had been compelled to pay in advance. "It does not matter," she mused, "we must all pay, and it may be all the sweeter because I know that no further payment will be demanded."

She was thinking of it when she fell asleep, and in her dream she stood at a counter with a great throng of people, pushing and jostling.

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Behind the counter was one in the form of a man who appeared to be an angel. His face was serene and calm; he seemed far removed from the passions which swayed the multitude. He conducted his business without hurry or fret, and all the pushing availed nothing. His voice was clear and high, and had in it a sense of finality. No one questioned him, though many went away grumbling.

"You have come to buy wealth?" he asked. "We have it for sale, but the price of it is your peace of mind. For knowledge, we ask human sympathy; if you take much of it, you lose the capacity to feel with your fellow men. If you take beauty, you must give up your right to love, and take the risk of an ignoble passion in its place. If you want fame, you must pay the price of eternal loneliness. For love, you must give self-surrender, and take the hurts of it without complaining. For health, you pay in self-denial and right living. Yes, you may take what you like, and the bill will be collected later, but there is no exchange, and you must buy something. Take as long as you wish to choose, but you must buy and you must pay."

Margaret awoke with his voice thundering in her ears: "You must buy and you must pay." The dream was extraordinarily vivid, and it seemed as though someone shared it with her. It was difficult to believe that it had not actually happened.

"I have bought," she said to herself, "and I have paid. Now it only remains for me to enjoy Lynn's triumph. He will not have to pay — his mother has paid for him."

At breakfast, Iris was more like herself, and Lynn was in good spirits. "I dreamed all night," he said, cheerily, "and one dream kept coming back. I was buying something somewhere and refusing to pay for it, and there was a row about it. I insisted that the thing was paid for — I don't know what it was, but it was something I wanted."

"We always pay," said Iris, sadly; "but I can't help wondering what I am paying for now."

"Perhaps," suggested Margaret, "you are paying in advance."

Iris brightened, and upon her face came the ghost of a smile. "That may be," she answered.

"Iris," asked Lynn, "will you go out

Her Name-Flower

with me this afternoon? You have n't been for a long time."

"I don't think so," she replied, dully. "It is kind of you, but I 'm not very strong just now."

"We 'll walk slowly," Lynn assured her, "and it will do you good. Won't you come, just to please me?"

His voice was very tender, and Iris sighed. "I 'll see," she said, resignedly; "I don't care what I do."

"At three, then," said Lynn. "I 'll get through practising by that time and I 'll be waiting for you."

At the appointed time they started, and Margaret waved her hand at them as they went down the path. Iris was so thin and fragile that it seemed as if any passing wind might blow her away. Lynn was very careful and considerate.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"I don't care; I don't want to climb, though. Let 's keep on level ground."

"Very well, but where? Which way?"

Iris felt the stiff corner of the letter hidden in her gown. "Let 's go up the river," she said. "I 've never been there and I 'd like to go."

So they followed the course of the stream, and the fresh air brought a faint colour into her cheeks. As the giant of old gained strength from his mother earth, Iris revived in the sunshine. The long period of inactivity demanded exertion to balance it.

"It is lovely," she said. "It seems good to be moving around again."

"I 'll take you every day," returned Lynn, "if you 'll only come. I want to see you happy again."

"I shall never be as happy as I was," she sighed. "No one is the same after a sorrow like mine."

"I suppose not," answered Lynn. "We are always changing. No one can go back of to-day and be the same as he was yesterday. I often think that old Greek philosopher was right when he said that the one thing common to all life was change."

"Which one was he?"

"Heraclitus, I think. Anyhow, he was a clever old duck."

Iris smiled. "I have sometimes thought ducks were philosophers," she said, "but it never occurred to me that philosophers were ducks."

Her Name a Flower

Lynn laughed heartily, thoroughly pleased with himself because Iris seemed so much better. "We don't want to go too far," he said. "I would n't tire you for anything. Shall we go back?"

"No — not yet. Is n't there a marsh up here somewhere?"

"I should think there would be."

"Then let 's keep on and see if we don't find it. I feel as though I were exploring a new country. It 's strange that I 've never been here before, is n't it?"

"It 's because I was n't here to take you, but you 'll always have me now. You and I and mother are all going to live together. Won't that be nice?"

"Yes," answered Iris, but her voice sounded far away and her eyes filled.

Late afternoon flooded the earth with gold, and from distant fields came the drowsy hum and whir of the fairy folk with melodious wings. The birds sang cheerily, butterflies floated in the fragrant air, and it was difficult to believe that in all the world there was such a thing as Death.

"I 'm not going to let you go any farther," said Lynn. "You 'll be tired."

"No, I won't, and besides, I want to see the marsh."

"My dear girl, you could n't see it — you could only stand on the edge of it."

"Well, I 'll stand on the edge of it, then," said Iris, stubbornly. "I 've come this far, and I 'm going to see it."

"Suppose we climb that hill yonder," suggested Lynn. "It overlooks the marsh."

"That will do," returned Iris. "I 'm willing to climb now, though I was n't when we started."

At first, Lynn walked by her side, warning her to go slowly, then he took her hand to help her. When they reached the summit, he had his arm around her, and it was some minutes before it occurred to him to take it away.

Iris was looking at the tapestry spread out before them—the great marsh with the sunset light upon it and the swallows circling above it.

"Oh," she whispered, with her face alight, "how beautiful it is! See all the purple in it —why, it might be violets, from up here!"

"Yes," answered Lynn, dreamily, "it is your name-flower, the fleur-de-lis." Then

Her Name-Flower

the colour flamed in his face and he bit his lips.

Quick as a flash, Iris turned upon him. "Did you write the letters?" she demanded.

Lynn's eyes met hers clearly. "Yes," he said, very tenderly. "Dear Heart, did n't you know?"

XV

Little Lady

UP in the attic, Iris sat beside the old trunk, her lap filled with papers. Never had she felt so alone, so desolate as to-day. The rain beat upon the roof and grey swirls of water dashed against the pane. The old house rocked in the rising wind, and from below, like an eerie accompaniment, came the sound of Lynn's violin.

He was practising, and Iris heard him walking back and forth, playing with mechanical precision. She shuddered at the sound of it, for, strangely enough, she was conscious of bitter resentment against Lynn. His hand had destroyed her dream and levelled it to the dust. In the darkness, she had leaned, insensibly, upon the writer of the letters, and now she knew that it was only Lynn—Lynn, who had no heart.

There comes a time to most of us, when

the single prop gives way and, absolutely alone, we either stand or fall. In the hard school of life, sooner or later, one learns self-reliance. Iris began to perceive that, in the end, she could depend upon no one but herself.

With a sigh, she turned to the papers once more. There was the report of the detective whom Aunt Peace had engaged at the beginning, voluminous, and obscured by legal phrases. Two or three letters, bearing upon the subject, were attached to it. In the bottom of the box were a wide, showy band of gold which, presumably, had been her mother's wedding ring, and two photographs.

One was of a man whose weakness was indelibly stamped upon every feature — the low, narrow forehead, the eyes slanting inward, the full lips, and receding chin. On the back of it, Aunt Peace had written: "Supposed to be her father." Looking at it, Iris wondered how her mother could have cared for a man like that — weak and frankly sensuous. Yet there was an air of gay carelessness about the picture, a sort of friendly *camaraderie,* distantly related to those genial ways which stamp a higher grade of man as "a good fellow."

Over the other photograph, she lingered long. The first Iris Temple was pictured in the panoply of a stage queen. The crown of paste brilliants upon her head, the tawdry gown, elaborately trimmed with tinsel, and the gilded sceptre were all discredited by the face. Beneath its mask of artificiality was a woman, a very human woman, impulsive, eager, and loving, whose trustful eyes looked straight at Iris with intimate comprehension. Plainly, the life of the stage was not to her taste; she hungered, as every normal woman hungers, for the quiet hearthstone and the simple joys of home.

In all her dreams of her mother, Iris had never imagined her like this, and yet she was not disappointed. At times, looking back upon her miserable childhood, she had bitterly blamed her for it, but now, for the first time, she understood. "Poor little mother," said Iris, "you did the very best you could."

If things had been different, she and her mother could have had a little home of their own. Rebellion was hot in the girl's heart, when she suddenly remembered something Fräulein Fredrika had said long ago.

"Wherever one may be, that is the best place. The dear God knows."

She folded up the papers and put them back in the box, with the photographs and the wedding ring. For the moment, she wondered what her real name might be, for Iris Temple was only a stage name. Then she dismissed the matter as of no importance, for she certainly would not care to bear the name of the man who had deserted her mother in her hour of need.

She wondered why Aunt Peace had never given her the papers before, but, after all, what good could it have done? What had she gained by it, even now? In a flash of insight, she saw that she had been given a feeling of definite relationship with the woman in the tawdry stage trappings, who had loved much and suffered more — that though an old grave divided them, she was not quite motherless, not quite alone. For the first time since Aunt Peace was stricken with the fever, balm came into the girl's sore heart.

Below, Lynn played unceasingly. "Four hours a day," thought Iris. "One sixth of life — and for what?"

Lynn was asking himself the same question. "For what?" Ambition was strong within him, but Herr Kaufmann's words had struck deep. "I will be an artist!" he said to himself, passionately; "I will!" He worked feverishly at his concerto, but his mind was not upon it. He was thinking of Iris and of the unconscious scorn in her face when she discovered that he had written the letters.

He put down his violin and meditated, as many a man in that very room had done before him, upon the problem of the eternal feminine. Iris was incomprehensible. He knew that the letters had not displeased her; that, on the contrary, she had been unusually happy when they came. He remembered also that moonlight night, when, safely screened by the shrubbery across the street, he had seen her put the flower upon the gate-post and as swiftly take it away. He had loved her all the more for that quick impulse, that shame-faced retreat, and put the memory securely away in his heart, biding his time.

"Iris," he asked, at luncheon, "will you go for a walk with me this afternoon?"

"No," she returned, shortly.

"Why not? It is n't too wet, is it?"

Little Lady

"I'm going by myself. I prefer to be alone."

Lynn coloured and said nothing more. In the afternoon, while he was at work, he saw her trip daintily down the path, lifting her skirts to avoid the pools of water the Summer shower had left. He watched her until she was no longer within range of his vision, then went back to his violin.

Iris had no definite errand except to the post-office, where, as usual, there was nothing, but it rested her to be outdoors. It is Nature's unfailing charm that she responds readily to every mood, and ultimately brings extremes to a common level of quiet cheerfulness.

She leaned over the bridge and looked into the stream, where her own face was mirrored. She saw herself sad and old, a woman of mature years, still further aged by trouble. What had become of the happy girl of a few months ago?

The thought of Lynn recurred persistently, and always with repulsion. What should she do? She could not wholly ignore him, year in and year out, and live in the same house. It must be nearly time for him to go away and leave her in peace.

Then Iris gasped, for it was Lynn's house, — his and his mother's. She was there upon sufferance only — a guest? No, not a guest — an intruder, an interloper.

In her new trouble, she thought of Herr Kaufmann, always gentle, always wise. With Iris, action followed swiftly upon impulse, and she went rapidly up the hill. Fräulein Fredrika was out, but the Master was in the shop, so she went in at the lower door.

"So," he said, kindly, "one little lady comes to see the old man. It is long since you have come."

"I have been in trouble," faltered Iris.

"Yes," returned the Master, "I have heard. Mine heart has been very sorry for you."

"It was lovely of you," she went on, choking back a sob, "to come and play for us. We appreciated it — Mrs. Irving and I — Doctor Brinkerhoff — and — Lynn," she added, grudgingly.

"The Herr Irving," said the Master, with interest, "he has appreciated mine playing?"

"Of course — we all did."

"Mine pupil progresses," he remarked, enigmatically.

Little Lady

"Was it," began Iris, hesitating over the words,—"was it the Cremona?"

The Master looked at her sharply. "Yes, why not? One gives one's best to Death."

"Death demands it, and takes it," said the girl. "That is why."

She spoke bitterly, and Herr Kaufmann put down the violin he was working upon. His heart went out to Iris, white-faced and ghostly, her eyes burning fiercely. He saw that her hands were trembling, and, moving his chair closer, he took them both in his.

"Little lady," he said, "it makes mine old heart ache to see you so close with sorrow. If it could be divided, I would take mine share, because these broad shoulders are used to one heavy burden, and a little more would not matter so much, but one must learn, even though the cross is very hard to bear.

"It is most difficult, and yet some day you will see. You have only to look out of your window for one year to understand it all. First it is Winter, and the snow is deep upon the ground. All the flowers are dead, and there are no birds. The moon shines cold, and there are many storms. But, so slow that you can never see it, there is change.

Presently, the bare branches turn in their sleep and wake up with leaves. The birds come back, and all the earth is glad again.

"Then everything grows and it is all in one blossom. On the wide fields there is much grain, and all hearts are singing. Even after the frost, everything is glad for a little while, and then, very slowly, it is Winter once more.

"Little lady, do you not see? There must always be Winter, there must always be night and storm and cold. It is then that the flowers rest — they cannot always be in bloom. But somewhere on the great world the sun is always shining, and, just so sure as you live, it will sometime shine on you. The dear God has made it so. There is so much sun and so much storm, and we must have our share of both. It is Winter in your heart now, but soon it will be Spring. You have had one long Summer, and there must be something in between. We are not different from all else the dear God has made. It is all in one law, as the Herr Doctor will tell you. He is most wise, and he has helped me to understand."

"But Aunt Peace!" sobbed the girl. "Aunt Peace is dead, and mother, too! I am all alone!"

Little Lady

"Little lady," said the Master, very tenderly, "you must never say you are alone. Because you have had much love, shall you be a child when it is taken away? Has it meant so little to you that it leaves nothing? Just so strong and beautiful as it has been, just so much strength and beauty does it leave. There are many, in this world, who would be so glad to change places with you. To be dead," he went on, bitterly, "that is nothing beside one living grave! It is by far the easier loss!"

He left her and went to the window, where he stood for a long time with his back toward her. Then Iris perceived her own selfishness, and she crept up beside him, slipping her cold little hand into his. "I understand," she said, gently, "you have had sorrow, too."

The Master smiled, but she saw that his eyes were wet. "Yes," he sighed, "I know mine sorrow. We are old friends." Then he stooped and kissed her, ever so softly, upon her forehead. It was like a benediction.

"I think," she said, after a little, "that I must go away from East Lancaster."

"So? And why?"

Iris knit her brows thoughtfully. "Well," she explained, "I have no right here. The house is Mrs. Irving's, and after her it belongs to Lynn. Aunt Peace said it was to be my home while I lived, but that was only because she did not want to turn me out. She was too kind to do that, but I do not belong there."

"The Herr Irving," said the Master, in astonishment. "Does he want you to go away?"

"No! No!" cried Iris. "Don't misunderstand! They have said nothing — they have been lovely to me — but I can't help feeling ——"

The Master nodded. "Yes, I see. Perhaps you will come to live with mine sister and me. The old house needs young faces and the sound of young feet. Mine house," he said, with quiet dignity, "is very large."

Even in her perplexity, Iris wondered why the little bird-house on the brink of the cliff always seemed a mansion to its owner. Quickly, he read her thought.

"I know what you are thinking," he continued; "you are thinking that mine house is small. Three rooms upstairs and three rooms

Little Lady

downstairs. Fredrika could sleep in mine room, and I could take the store closet back of mine shop and keep the wood for the violins at the Herr Doctor's. Upstairs, you could have one bedroom and one parlour. Fredrika and I would come up only to eat."

"Herr Kaufmann," cried Iris, her heart warming to him, "it is lovely of you, but I can't. Don't you see, if I could stay anywhere I could stay where I am?"

It was not a clear sentence, but he grasped its meaning. "Yes, I see. But when I say mine house is large, it is not of these six rooms that I think. Have you not read in the good book that in mine Father's house there are many mansions? So? Well, it is in those mansions that I live. I have put aside mine sorrow, and I wait till the dear God is pleased to take me home."

"To take us home," said Iris, thoughtfully. "Perhaps Aunt Peace was tired."

"Yes," answered the Master, "she was tired. Otherwise, she would have been allowed to stay. You have not been thinking of her, but of yourself."

"Perhaps I have," she admitted.

"If you go away," he went on, "it is

better that you should study. You have one fine voice, and with sorrow in your heart, you can make much from it. Those who have been made great have first suffered."

Iris turned upon him. "You mean that?" she asked, sharply.

"Of course," he returned, serenely. "Before you can help those who have suffered, you must suffer yourself. It is so written."

Iris sighed heavily. "I must go," she said, dully.

"Not yet. Wait."

He went to his bedroom, and came back with a violin case. He opened it carefully, unwrapped the many thicknesses of silk, and took out the Cremona. "See," he said, with his face aglow, "is it not most beautiful? When you are sad, you can remember that you have seen mine Cremona."

"Thank you," returned Iris, her voice strangely mingled with both laughter and tears, "I will remember."

When she went home, the Master looked after her for a moment or two, then turned away from the window to wipe his eyes. He was drawn by temperament to all who sorrowed, and he had loved Iris for years.

Little Lady

That night, she sat alone in the library, sheltered by the darkness. Margaret was reading in her own room, and Lynn was out. More clearly than ever, Iris saw that she must go away. She had no definite plan, but Herr Kaufmann's suggestion seemed a good one.

When Lynn came in, he lit the candles in the parlour. Iris hoped he would go upstairs without coming into the library, but he did not. She shrank back into her chair, trusting that he would not see her, but with unerring instinct he went straight to her.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "are you here?"

"I 'm here," said Iris, frostily, "but that is n't my name."

The timid little voice thrilled him with a great tenderness, and he quickly possessed himself of her hand. "Iris, darling," he went on, "why do you avoid me? I have been miserable ever since I told you I wrote the letters."

"It was wrong to write them," she said.

"Why, dear?"

"Because."

"Did n't you like them?"

"No."

"I did n't think you were displeased." He was too chivalrous to remind her of that moonlight night.

"It was very wrong," she repeated, stubbornly.

"Then forgive me."

"It 's nothing to me," she returned, unmoved.

"I hoped it would be," said Lynn, gently. "Every time, I walked over to the next town to mail them. I knew you had n't seen any of my writing, and I was sure you would n't suspect me."

"Nice advantage to take of a girl, was n't it?" demanded Iris, her temper rising.

She rose and started toward the door, but Lynn kept her back. The starlight showed him her face, white and troubled. "Sweetheart," he said, "listen. Just a moment, dear — that is n't much to ask, is it? If it was wrong to write the letters, then I ask you to forgive me, but every word was true. I love you, Iris — I love you with all my heart."

"With all your heart," she repeated, scornfully. "You have no heart!"

"Iris," he said, unsteadily, "what do you mean?"

Little Lady

"This," she cried, in a passion. "You have no more feeling than the ground beneath your feet! Have n't I seen, have n't I known? Aunt Peace died, and you did not care — you only thought it was unpleasant. You play like a machine, a mountebank. Tricks with the violin—tricks with words! And yet you dare to say you love me!"

"Iris! Darling!" cried Lynn, stung to the quick. "Don't!"

"Once for all I will have my say. To-morrow I go out of your house forever. I have no right here, no place. I am an intruder, and I am going away. You will never see me again, never as long as you live. You, a machine, a clod, a trickster, a thing without a heart — you shall not insult me again!"

White to the lips, trembling like a leaf, Iris shook herself free and ran up to her room.

Lynn drew a long, shuddering breath. "God!" he whispered, clenching his hands tightly. "God!"

XVI

Afraid of Life

SHE kept her word. To Mrs. Irving she merely said that she had already trespassed too long upon their hospitality, and that she thought it best to go away. She had talked with Herr Kaufmann, and he had advised her to go to the city and have her voice trained. Yes, she would write, and would always think of them kindly.

Lynn, who had passed the first sleepless night of his life, went to the train with her, but few words were spoken. Iris was cool, dignified, and cruelly formal. An immeasurable distance lay between them, and one, at least, made no effort to lessen it.

They had only a few minutes to wait, and, just as the train came in sight, Lynn bent over her. "Iris," he said, unsteadily, "if you ever want me, will you promise me that you will let me know?"

"Yes," she replied, with an incredulous laugh, "if I ever want you, I will let you know."

"I will go to you," said Lynn, struggling for his self-control, "from the very end of the world. Just send me the one word: 'Come.' And let me thank you now for all the happiness you have given me, and for the memory of you, which I shall have in my heart for always."

"You are quite welcome," she returned, frigidly. "You —" but the roar of the train mercifully drowned her words.

The sun still shone, the birds did not cease their singing. Outwardly, the world was just as fair, even though Iris had gone. Lynn walked away blindly, no longer dull, but keenly alive to his hurt.

From the crucible of Eternity, Time, the magician, draws the days. Some are wholly made of beauty; of wide sunlit reaches and cool silences. Some of dreams and twilight, with roses breathing fragrance through the dusk. Some of darkness, wild and terrible, lighted only by a single star. Others still of riving lightnings and vast, reverberating thunders, while the heart, swelled to bursting, breaks on the reef of Pain.

It seemed as though Lynn's heart were rising in an effort to escape. "I must keep it down," he thought. It was like an imprisoned bird, cut, bruised, and bleeding, beating against the walls of flesh. And yet, there was a hand upon it, and the iron fingers clutched unmercifully.

Iris had gone, and the dream was at an end. Iris had gone, flouting him to the last, calling his love an insult. "Machine—clod—mountebank"—the bitter words rang through his consciousness again and again.

It might be true, part of it at least. Herr Kaufmann had told him, more than once, that he played like a machine. Clod? Possibly. Mountebank? That might be, too. Trickster with the violin, trickster with words? Perhaps. But a thing without a heart? Lynn laughed bitterly and put his hand against his breast to quiet the throbbing.

No one knew — no one must ever know. Iris would not betray him, he was sure of that, but he must be on his guard lest he should betray himself. He must hide it, must keep on living, and appear to be the same. His mother's keen eyes must see nothing amiss. Fortunately, he could be alone a great

Afraid of Life

deal — outdoors, or practising, and at night. He shuddered at the white night through which he had somehow lived, and wondered how many more would follow in its train.

Suddenly, he remembered that it was his lesson day, and he was not prepared. Common courtesy demanded that he should go up to Herr Kaufmann's, and tell him that he did not feel like taking his lesson — that he had a headache, or something of the kind — that he had hurt his wrist, perhaps.

He hoped that Fräulein Fredrika would come to the door, and that he might leave his message with her, but it was Herr Kaufmann who answered his ring.

"So," said the Master, "you are once more late."

"No," answered Lynn, refusing to meet his eyes, "I just came to tell you that I could n't take my lesson to-day. I don't think," he stammered, "that I can ever take any more lessons."

"And why?" demanded the Master. "Come in!"

Before he realised it, he was in the parlour, gay with its accustomed bright colours. One look at Lynn's face had assured Herr Kauf-

mann that something was wrong, and, for the first time, he was drawn to his pupil.

"So," said the Master. "Mine son, is it not well with you?"

Lynn turned away to hide the working of his face. "Not very," he answered in a low tone.

"Miss Iris," said the Master, "she will have gone away?"

It was like the tearing of a wound. "Yes," replied Lynn, almost in a whisper, "she went this morning."

"And you are sad because she has gone away? I am sorry mineself. Miss Iris is one little lady."

"Yes," returned Lynn, clenching his hands, "she is."

Something in the boy's eyes stirred an old memory, and made the Master's heart very tender toward him. "Mine son," he said very gently, "if something has troubled you, perhaps it will give you one relief to tell me. Only yesterday Miss Iris was here. She was very sad when she came, and when she went away the world was more sunny, or so I think."

Quickly surmising that Herr Kaufmann had

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something more than a hint of it, and more eager for sympathy than he realised, Lynn stammered out the story, choking at the end of it.

There was a long silence, in which the Master went back twenty-five years. Lynn's eyes, so full of trouble, were they not like another's, long ago? The organ-tone of the thunder once more reverberated through the forest, where the great boughs arched like the nave of a cathedral, and the dead leaves scurried in fright before the rising wind.

"That is all," said the boy, his face white to the lips. "It is not much, but it is a great deal to me."

"So," said the Master, scornfully, "you are to be an artist and you are afraid of life! You are summoned to the ranks of the great and you shrink from the signal—cover your ears, that you shall not hear the trumpet call! This, when you should be on your knees, thanking the good God that at last He has taught you pain!"

Lynn's face was pitiful, and yet he listened eagerly.

"There is no half-way point," the Master was saying; "if you take it, you must pay.

Nothing in this world is free but the sun and the fresh air. You must buy shelter, food, clothing, with the work of your hands and brain. If someone else gives it to you, it is not yours — you are one parasite. You must earn it all.

"You think you can take all, and give nothing? It is not so. For six, eight years now, you study the violin. You learn the scales, the technique, the good wrist, and nothing else. I teach you all I can, but it must come from yourself, not me. I can only guide — tell you when you have made one mistake.

"What is it that the art is for? Is it for one great assembly of people to pay the high price for admission? 'See,' they say, 'this young man, what good tone he has, what bowing, what fine wrist! How smooth he plays his concerto! When it is marked fortissimo, see how he plays fortissimo! It is most skilful!' Is the art for that? No!

"It is for everyone in the world who has known trouble to be lifted up and made strong. They care nothing for the means, only for the end. They have no eyes for the fine bowing, the good wrist — what shall

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they know of technique? And yet you must have the technique, else you cannot give the message.

"Everyone that hears has had his own sorrow. None of them are new ones, they are all old, and so few that one person can suffer all. It is for you to take that, to know the hurt heart and the rebellious soul, so that you can comfort, lift up, and make noble with your art.

"And you — you cry out when you should be glad. Miss Iris does not love you, and beyond that you do not see. Suppose one thousand people were before you, and all had loved someone who did not care for them. Could you make it easier if you knew nothing of it by yourself?

"Listen. On a hill in Italy there was once a tree. It was a seed at the beginning, a seed you could hold with the ends of your fingers, so. It was buried in the ground, covered up with earth like something that had died. Do you think the seed liked that?

"But is it afraid, when its heart is swelling? No! It breaks through, with the great hurt. Still there is earth around it, still it is buried, but yet it aspires. One day it comes to the

surface of the ground, and once more it breaks through, with pain.

"But the sun is bright and warm, and the seed grows. Careless feet trample upon it — there is yet one more hurt. But it straightens, waits through the long nights for the blessed sun, and so on, until it is so high as one bush.

"Constantly, there is growing, one aspiration upward. Bark comes and the tree swells outward, always with pain. Someone cuts off all the lower branches, and the tree bleeds, yet keeps on. Other branches come thick about it; there is one struggle, but through the dense growth the tree climbs, always upward. In the sun above the thick shade, it can laugh at the ache and the thorns, but it does not forget.

"And so, upward, always upward, till it is lifted high above its fellows. Birds come there to sing, to build their nests, to rear their young, to mourn when one little bird falls out from the nest and is made dead.

"The sun shines fiercely, and it nearly dies in the heat. The storm comes and it is shrouded in ice — made almost to die with the cold. The wild winds rock it and tear off the branches, making it bleed — there

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must always be pain. The thunders play over its head, the lightnings burn it, and yet its heart lives on. The rains beat upon it like one river, and still it grows.

"The years go by and each one brings new hurt, but the tree is made hard and strong. One day there comes a man to look at it, all the straight fine length, the smooth trunk. 'It will do,' he says, and with his axe he chops it down. Do you think it does not hurt the tree? After the long years of fighting, to be cut like that?

"Then it falls, crashing heavy through the branches to the ground. See, there must always be pain, even at the end. Then more cutting, more bleeding, more heat, more cold. Fine tools — steel knives that tear and split the fibres apart. Do you think it does not hurt? More sun, more cold, still more cutting, tearing, and throwing aside. Then, one day, it is finished, and there is mine Cremona — all the strength, all the beauty, all the pain, made into mine violin!

"But the end is not yet. God is working with me and mine as well as with mine instrument. As yet, I do not know that it is for me — it comes to me through pain.

"One old gentleman, one of the first to travel abroad from this country for pleasure, he goes to Italy, he finds it in the hands of one ignorant drunkard, and he buys it for little. He brings it home, but he cannot play, and no one else can play; he does not know its value, but it pleases him and he takes it. For long years, it stays in one attic, with the dust and the cobwebs, kicked aside by careless feet.

"Meanwhile, I know one lovely young lady. I meet her by chance, and we like each other, oh, so much! 'Franz,' she says to me, 'you live on one hill in West Lancaster, and mine mother, she would never let me speak with you, so I must see you sometimes, quite by accident, elsewhere. On pleasant days, I often go to walk in the woods. Mine mother likes me to be outdoors.' So, many times, we meet and we talk of strange things. Each day we love each other more, and all the time her mother does not suspect. We plan to go away together and never let anyone know until we are married and it is too late, but first I must find work.

"'Franz,' she says to me one day, 'up in

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mine attic there is one old violin, which I think must be valuable. Mine mother is away with a friend and the house is by itself. Will you not come up to see?'

"So we go, and the house is very quiet. No one is there. We go like two thieves to the attic, laughing as though we were children once more. Presently we find the violin, and I see that it is one Cremona, very old, very fine, but with no strings. I fit on some strings that I have in mine pocket, but there is no bow and I can only play pizzicato. I need to hear the tone but one moment to know what it is that I have. 'It is most wonderful,' I say, and then the door opens and one very angry lady stands there.

"She tells me that I shall never come into that house again, that I must go right away, that I have no — what do you say? — no social place, and that I am not to speak with her daughter. To her she says: 'I will attend to you very soon.' We creep down the stairs together and mine Beloved whispers: 'Every day at four, at the old place, until I come.' I understand and I go away, but mine heart is very troubled for her.

"For long days I wait, and every day, at

four, I am at the meeting-place in the wood, but no one comes, and there is no message, no word. All the time I feel as you feel now because Miss Iris has gone away and does not care. I wait and wait, but I can get no news, and I fear to go to the house because I shall perhaps harm mine Beloved, and she has told me what to do. Every day I am there, even in the rain, waiting.

"At last she comes, with the violin under her arm, wrapped in her coat. 'I have only one minute,' she cries; 'they are going to take me away, and we can never see each other again. So I give you this. You must keep it, and when you are sad it will tell you how much I love you, how much I shall always love you. You will not forget me,' she says. There is just one instant more together, with the thunders and the lightnings all around us, then I am alone, except for mine violin.

"Do you not see? There must always be pain. The dear God has made mine instrument, and in the same way He has made me, with the cutting and the bruises and the long night. I, too, have known the storm and all the fury of the winds and rain. Like the

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tree, I have aspired, I have grown upward, I have done the best I could. Otherwise, I should not be fitted to play on mine Cremona — I would not deserve to touch it, and so, in a way, I am glad.

"I have had mine fame," he went on. "With the sorrow in mine heart, I have studied and worked until I have made mineself one great artist. If you do not believe, I can show you the papers, where much has been written of me and mine violin. Women have cried when I have played, and have thrown their red roses to me. I had the technique, and when the hurt broke open mine heart, I was immediately one artist. I understood, I could play, I could lift up all who suffered, because I had known suffering mineself.

"Mine son, do you not understand? You can give only what you have. If one sorrow is in your heart, if you have learned the beauty and the nobility of it, you can teach others the same thing. You can show them how to rise above it, like the tree that had one long lifetime of hurt, and ended in mine Cremona to help all who hear. The one who plays the instrument must be made in the same way, of the same influences—the cutting, the

night, and the cold. Of softness nothing good ever comes, for one must always fight.

"Nothing in this whole world is free but the sun and the fresh air and the water to drink. We must pay the fair price for all else. I have had mine fame and I have paid mine price, but the heights are lonely, and sometimes I think it would be better to walk in the valley with a woman's hand in mine. But at the first, before I knew, I chose. I said: 'I will be an artist,' and so I am, but I have paid, oh, mine son, I have paid and I am still paying! There is no end!"

The Master's face was grey and haggard, but his eyes burned. Lynn saw what it had cost him to open this secret chamber — to lay bare this old wound. "And I," he said huskily, "I touched the Cremona!"

"Yes," said the Master, sadly, "on that first day, you lifted up mine Cremona, and until to-day I have never forgiven. There has been resentment in mine old heart for you, though I have tried to put it aside. Her hands were last upon it — hers and mine. When I touched it, it was the place where her white fingers rested, where many a time

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I put mine kiss to ease mine heart. And you, you took that away from me!"

"If I had only known," murmured Lynn.

"But you did not know," said the Master, kindly; "and to-day I have forgiven."

"Thank you," returned Lynn, with a lump in his throat; "it is much to give."

"Sometimes," sighed the Master, "when I have been discouraged, I have been very hungry for someone to understand me—someone to laugh, to touch mine tired eyes, to make me forget with her little sweet ways. In mine fancy, I have seen it all, and more.

"When I have gone down the hill to the post-office, where there has never been the letter from her, and the little children have run to me, holding out their arms that I should take them up, I have felt that the price was too high that I have paid. But all the time I have understood that on the heights one must go alone, for a time at least, with the thunders and the lightnings and the storms. If I had been given one son, I think he would have been like you, one fine tall young fellow with the honest face and the laughing ways, but you have been shielded, and I should not have done

so. I should have let you grow from the start and learn all things so soon as you could."

"I never knew my father," Lynn said, deeply moved, "but if I could choose, I would choose you."

"So," said the Master, his eyes filling. Then their hands met in a long clasp of understanding.

"Already I am the richer for it," Lynn went on, after a little. "I know now what I did not know before."

The boy's face was still white, but the look of hopeless despair was merged into something which foreshadowed ultimate acceptance. The Master still held his hand.

"If you are to be an artist," he said, once more, "you must not be afraid of life. You must welcome it to its utmost cross. You must take the cold, the heat, the poverty, the hunger, the burning way through the desert, the snow-clad steeps, the keen hurt, and the happiness — it is all one, for it gives you knowledge. You must know all the pain of the world, face to face, if you are to help those who bear it. Keen feelings give you the great hurt, but also, in payment, the great joy. The balance swings true. The

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Herr Doctor has told me this. He is most wise; he understands."

"I see," answered Lynn. "I will never be afraid again."

"That," said the Master, with his face alight,— "that is mine son's true courage. Take it with your head up, your teeth shut, and your heart always believing. Fear nothing, and much will be given back to you,— is it not so? Let life do all it can — you will never be crushed unless you are willing that it should be so. Defeat comes only to those who invite it."

"I see," said Lynn, again; "with all my heart I thank you."

He went away soon afterward, insensibly comforted. Overnight, he had come into his heritage of pain, had lost the girl he loved, and in swift restitution found comradeship with the Master.

That stately figure lingered long before his vision, grey and rugged, yet with a certain graciousness — simple, kindly, and yet austere; one who had accepted his sorrow, and, by some alchemy of the spirit, transmuted it into universal compassion, to speak, through the Cremona, to all who could understand.

XVII

"He Loves Her Still"

WHEN Doctor Brinkerhoff came on Wednesday evening, he was surprised to discover that Iris had gone away. "It was sudden, was it not?" he asked.

"It seemed so to us," returned Margaret. "We knew nothing of it until the morning she started. She had probably been planning it for a long time, though she did not take us into her confidence until the last minute."

Lynn sat with his face turned away from his mother. "Did you, perhaps, suspect that she was going?" the Doctor directly inquired of Lynn.

He hesitated for the barest perceptible interval before he spoke. "She told us at the breakfast table," he answered. "Iris is replete with surprises."

"But before that," continued the Doctor, "did you have no suspicion?"

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Lynn laughed shortly. "How should I suspect?" he parried. "I know nothing of the ways of women."

"Women," observed the Doctor, with an air of knowledge,—" women are inscrutable. For instance, I cannot understand why Miss Iris did not come to say 'good-bye' to me. I am her foster-father, and it would have been natural."

"Good-byes are painful," said Margaret.

"We Germans do not say 'good-bye,' but only 'auf wiedersehen.' Perhaps we shall see her again, perhaps not. No one knows."

"Fräulein Fredrika does not say 'auf wiedersehen,'" put in Lynn, anxious to turn the trend of the conversation.

"No," responded the Doctor, with a smile. "She says: 'You will come once again, yes? It would be most kind.'"

He imitated the tone and manner so exactly that Lynn laughed, but it was a hollow laugh, without mirth in it. "Do not misunderstand me," said the Doctor, quickly; "it was not my intention to ridicule the Fräulein. She is a most estimable woman. Do you perhaps know her?" he asked of Margaret.

"I have not that pleasure," she replied.

"She was not here when I first came," the Doctor went on, "but Herr Kaufmann sent for her soon afterward. They are devoted to each other, and yet so unlike. You would have laughed to see Franz at work at his housekeeping, before she came."

A shadow crossed Margaret's face.

"I have often wondered," she said, clearing her throat, "why men are not taught domestic tasks as well as women. It presupposes that they are never to be without the inevitable woman, yet many of them often are. A woman is trained to it in the smallest details, even though she has reason to suppose that she will always have servants to do it for her. Then why not a man?"

"A good idea, mother," remarked Lynn. "To-morrow I shall take my first lesson in keeping house."

"You?" she said fondly; "you? Why, Lynn! Lacking the others, you'll always have me to do it for you."

"That," replied the Doctor, triumphantly, "disproves your own theory. If you are in earnest, begin on the morrow to instruct Mr. Irving."

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Margaret flushed, perceiving her own inconsistency.

"I could be of assistance, possibly," he continued, "for in the difficult school of experience I have learned many things. I have often taken professional pride in closing an aperture in my clothing with neat stitches, and the knowledge thus gained has helped me in my surgery. All things in this world fit in together."

"It is fortunate if they do," she answered. "My own scheme of things has been very much disarranged."

"Yet, as Fräulein Fredrika would say, 'the dear God knows.' Life is like one of those puzzles that come in a box. It is full of queer pieces which seemingly bear no relation to one another, and yet there is a way of putting it together into a perfect whole. Sometimes we make a mistake at the beginning and discard pieces for which we think there is no possible use. It is only at the end that we see we have made a mistake and put aside something of much importance, but it is always too late to go back—the pieces are gone.

"In my own life, I lost but one—still, it was the keystone of the whole. When I came from

Germany, I should have brought letters from those in high places there to those in high places here. It could easily have been done. I should have had this behind me when I came to East Lancaster, and I should not have made the mistake of settling first on the hill. Then ——" The Doctor ceased abruptly, and sighed.

"This country is supposed to be very democratic," said Lynn, chiefly because he could think of nothing else to say.

"Yes," replied the Doctor, "it is in your laws that all men are free and equal, but it is not so. The older civilisations have found there is class, and so you will find it here. At first, when everything is chaotic, all particles may seem alike, but in time there is an inevitable readjustment."

"We are getting very serious," said Margaret.

"It is an important subject," responded the Doctor, with dignity. "I have often discussed it with my friend, Herr Kaufmann. He is a very fine friend to have."

"Yes," said Lynn, "he is. It is only lately that I have learned to appreciate him."

"One must grow to understand him,"

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mused the Doctor. "At first, I did not. I thought him rough, queer, and full of sarcasm. But afterward, I saw that his harshness was only a mask—the bark, if I may say so. Beneath it, he has a heart of gold."

"People," began Margaret, avoiding the topic, "always seek their own level, just as water does. That is why there is class."

"But for a long time, they do not find it," objected the Doctor. "Miss Iris, for instance. Her people were of the common sort, and those with whom she lived afterward were worse still. She" — by the unconscious reverence in his voice, they knew whom he meant—"she taught her all the fineness she has, and that is much. It is an argument for environment, rather than heredity."

Lynn left the room abruptly, unable to bear the talk of Iris.

"I wish," said the Doctor, at length, "I wish you knew Herr Kaufmann. Would you like it if I should bring him to call?"

"No!" cried Margaret. "It is too soon," she added, desperately. "Too soon after——"

The Doctor nodded. "I understand," he said. "It was a mistake on my part, for which you must pardon me. I only thought

you might be a help to each other. Franz, too, has sorrowed."

"Has he?" asked Margaret, her lips barely moving.

"Yes," the Doctor went on, half to himself, "it was an unhappy love affair. The young lady's mother parted them because he lived in West Lancaster, though he, too, might have had letters from high places in Germany. He and I made the same mistake."

"Her mother," repeated Margaret, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, the young lady herself cared."

"And he," she breathed, leaning eagerly forward, her body tense,—"does he love her still?"

"He loves her still," returned the Doctor, promptly, "and even more than then."

"Ah—h!"

The Doctor roused himself. "What have I done!" he cried, in genuine distress. "I have violated my friend's confidence, unthinking! My friend, for whom I would make any sacrifice — I have betrayed him!"

"No," replied Margaret, with a great effort at self-control. "You have not told me her name."

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"It is because I do not know it," said the Doctor, ruefully. "If I had known, I should have bleated it out, fool that I am!"

"Please do not be troubled—you have done no harm. Herr Kaufmann and I are practically strangers."

"That is so," replied the Doctor, evidently reassured; "and I did not mean it. It is not the same thing as if I had done it purposely."

"Not at all the same thing."

At times, we put something aside in memory to be meditated upon later. The mind registers the exact words, the train of circumstances that caused their utterance, all the swift interplay of opposing thought, and, for the time being, forgets. Hours afterward, in solitude, it is recalled; studied from every point of view, searched, analysed, questioned, until it is made to yield up its hidden meaning. It was thus that Margaret put away those four words: "He loves her still."

They are pathetic, these tiny treasure-houses of Memory, where oftentimes the jewel, so jealously guarded, by the clear light of introspection is seen to be only paste. One seizes hungrily at the impulse that caused the hiding, thinking that there must be some cer-

tain worth behind the deception. But afterward, painfully sure, one locks the door of the treasure-chamber in self-pity, and steals away, as from a casket that enshrines the dead.

They talked of other things, and at half-past ten the Doctor went home, leaving a farewell message for Lynn, and begging that his kind remembrances be sent to Iris, when she should write.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Irving. "I shall surely tell her, and she will be glad."

The door closed, and almost immediately Lynn came in from the library, rubbing his eyes. "I think I 've been asleep," he said.

"It was rude, dear," returned Margaret, in gentle rebuke. "It is ill-bred to leave a guest."

"I suppose it is, but I did not intend to be gone so long."

The house seemed singularly desolate, filled, as it was, with ghostly shadows. Through the rooms moved the memory of Iris, and of that gentle mistress who slept in the churchyard, who had permeated every nook and corner of it with the sweetness of her personality. There was something in the

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air, as though music had just ceased — the wraith of long-gone laughter, the fall of long-shed tears.

"I miss Iris," said Margaret, dreamily. "She was like a daughter to me."

Taken off his guard, Lynn's conscious face instantly betrayed him.

"Lynn," said Margaret, suddenly, "did you have anything to do with her going away?"

The answer was scarcely audible. "Yes."

Margaret never forced a confidence, but after a pause she said very gently: "Dear, is there anything you want to tell me?"

"It's nothing," said Lynn, roughly. He rose and walked around the room nervously. "It's nothing," he repeated, with assumed carelessness. "I — I asked her to marry me, and she would n't. That's all. It's nothing."

Margaret's first impulse was to smile. This child, to be talking of marriage — then her heart leaped, for Lynn was twenty-three; older than she had been when the star rose upon her horizon and then set forever.

Then came a momentary awkwardness. Childish though the trouble was, she pitied Lynn, and regretted that she could not shield

him from it as she had shielded him from all else in his life.

Then resentment against Iris. What was she, a nameless outcast, to scorn the offered distinction? Any woman in the world might be proud to become Lynn's wife.

Then, smiling at her own folly, Margaret went to him, dominated solely by gratitude. Not knowing what else to do, she drew his tall head down to kiss him, but Lynn swerved aside, and with his face against the softness of his mother's hair, wiped away a boyish tear.

"Lynn," she said, tenderly, "you are very young."

"How old were you when you married, mother?"

"Twenty-one."

"How old was father?"

"Twenty-three."

"Then," persisted Lynn, with remorseless logic, "I am not too young, and neither is Iris — only she does n't care."

"She may care, son."

"No, she won't. She despises me."

"And why?"

"She said I had no heart."

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"The idea!"

"Maybe I did n't have then, but I 'm sure I have now."

He walked back and forth restlessly. Margaret knew that the griefs of youth are cruelly keen, because they come well in the lead of the strength to bear them. She was about to offer the usual threadbare consolation, "You will forget in time," when she remembered the stock of which Lynn came.

His mother, who had carried a secret wound for more than twenty-five years, who was she, to talk about forgetting, and, of all others, to her son?

Gratitude was still dominant, though in her heart of hearts she knew that she was selfish. Lynn felt the lack of sympathy, and became conscious, for the first time in his life, that her tenderness had a limit.

"Mother," he said, suddenly, "did you love father?"

"Why do you ask, son?"

"Because I want to know."

"I respected him highly," said Margaret, at length. "He was a good man, Lynn."

"You have answered," he returned. "You don't know — you don't understand."

"But I do understand," she flashed.

"You can't, if you did n't love father."

"I — I cared for someone else," said Margaret, thickly, unwilling to be convicted of shallowness.

Lynn looked at her quickly. "And you still care?"

Margaret bowed her head. "Yes," she whispered, "I still care!"

"Mother!" he cried. In an instant, his arms were around her and she was sobbing on his shoulder. "Mother," he pleaded, "forgive me! To think I never knew!"

They had a long talk then, intimate and searching. "You have borne it bravely," he said. "No one has ever dreamed of it, I am sure. The Master told me, the other day, that I must not be afraid of life. He said that everything, even our blessings, came to us through pain."

"I would not say everything," temporised Margaret, "but it is true that much comes that way. We know happiness only by contrast."

"Happiness and misery, light and dark, sunshine and storm, life and death," mused Lynn. "Yes, it is by contrast, but, as the

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Master says, 'the balance swings true.' I wish you knew him, mother; he has helped me. I never knew my father, so it is not wrong for me to say that I wish he might have been my father."

Margaret grew as cold as ice, and her senses reeled, then flame swept her from head to foot. "Come," she said, not knowing her own voice, "it is late."

Long afterward, in the solitude of her room, she took the precious thought from its hiding-place, and found it purest gold. It was as though all the bitterness in her heart, growing upward, through the years, had flowered overnight into a perfect rose.

XVIII

Lynn Comes Into His Own

AT the post-office there was a letter for Mrs. Irving. Lynn took it, with a lump rising in his throat, for, though he had never seen her handwriting, he knew, through a sixth sense, that it was from Iris. Evidently, it was a brief communication, for the envelope contained not more than a single sheet. The straight, precise slope of the address had an old-fashioned air. It was very different from the modern angular hand which demands a whole line for two or three words.

In some way, it brought her nearer to him, and in the shadow of the maple, just outside the house, he kissed the superscription before he took it in.

He waited, consciously, while his mother read it. It was little more than a note, saying that she was established in a hall bed-

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room in a city boarding-house, where she had the use of the piano in the parlour, and that she was taking two lessons a week and practising a great deal. She gave the name of her teacher, said she was well, and sent kind remembrances to all who might inquire for her.

With a woman's insight, Margaret read heartache between the lines. She knew that the note was brief because Iris did not dare to trust herself to write more. There was no mention of Lynn, but it was not because she had forgotten him.

Margaret gave the letter to Lynn, then turned away, that she might not see his face. "I shall write this afternoon," she said. "Shall I send any message for you?"

"No," returned Lynn, with a short, bitter laugh, "I have no message to send."

Her heart ached in sympathy, for by her own sorrow she measured the depth of his. She knew that the elasticity of youth would fail here — that Lynn was not of those who forget.

"Son," she said, gently, "I wish I might bear it for you."

"I would n't let you, mother, even if you

could. You have had enough as it is. Herr Kaufmann says you have always shielded me and that it was a mistake."

Had it been a mistake? Margaret thought it over after Lynn went away. She had shielded him — that was true. He had never learned by painful experience anything from which she had the power to save him. If his father had lived ——

For the first time, Margaret thought of her freedom as a doubtful blessing. Then, once more, she took the jewelled thought from its hiding-place in her inmost heart. There was no hint of alloy there — it was radiant with its own unspeakable beauty.

Lynn went to the post-office to mail the letter. East Lancaster considered post-boxes modern innovations which were reckless and unjustifiable. Suppose a stranger should be passing through East Lancaster, break open a post-box, and feloniously extract a private letter? What if the box should blow away? When a letter was placed in the hands of the accredited representative of the Government, one might be sure that it was safe, but not otherwise.

Doctor Brinkerhoff was talking with the

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postmaster, but he left him to speak to Lynn. "Miss Iris," he began, eagerly, "you have perhaps heard from her?"

"Yes," answered Lynn, dully, fingering the letter.

"Is she quite well?"

Briefly, Lynn told him what Iris had written.

"It was kind to send remembrances to all who might inquire," mused the Doctor. "That is like my foster-daughter; she is always thinking of others. She knew that I would be the first to ask. If you will give me the address, it will be a pleasure to me to write to her. She must be quite lonely where she is."

Lynn told him. Her letter was at home, but every syllable of it, even the prosaic address, was written in letters of fire upon his brain.

"Thank you," said the Doctor, as he took it down in his memorandum book; "I shall write to-night. Shall I give her any word from you?"

"No!" cried Lynn.

"Ah," laughed the Doctor, "I understand. You write yourself. Well, I will tell her a letter is coming. Good afternoon!"

He moved away, leaving Lynn cold from

head to foot. He was tempted to call the Doctor back, to ask him not to mention his name to Iris, then he reflected that an explanation would be necessary. In any event, Iris would understand. She would know that he did not intend to write—that he had sent no message.

But, three days later, it was fated that Iris should tremble at the sight of Lynn's name in a letter from East Lancaster. "I think he will write soon," Doctor Brinkerhoff had said. "Mr. Irving is a very fine gentleman and I have deep respect for him."

"Write to me!" repeated Iris. "He would not dare! Why should he write to me?" She put the letter aside and read over those three anonymous communications of Lynn's, making a vain effort to associate them with his personality.

Meanwhile, Lynn was learning endurance. He slept but fitfully, awaking always with the sense of choking and of a hand pulling at his heart. He saw Iris everywhere. There was no room in the house, except his own, that was not full of her and of the faint, elusive perfume which seemed a part of her. Sometimes those ghostly images haunted him

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until he could bear no more. Margaret often saw him throw down the book he was reading and dash outdoors. For an hour, perhaps, he had not turned a page, and the book was a flimsy pretence at best.

He had not touched his violin since Iris went away. More than anything else, it spoke to him of her. "Trickster with the violin" seemed written upon it for all the world to read. Dimly, he knew that work was the only panacea for heartache, but he could not bring himself to go on with his mechanical practising.

Summer was drawing to its close. Already there was a single scarlet bough in the maple at the gate, where the frost had set its signal and its promise of return. Many of the birds had gone, and fairy craft of winged seeds, the sport of every wind, drifted aimlessly about in search of some final harbour.

Strangely, Lynn rather avoided his mother. He felt her sympathy, her comprehension, and yet he shrank from her. She was gentle and patient, responded readily to his every mood, and rarely offered a caress, yet he continually shrank back within himself.

He had made no friends in East Lancaster,

though he knew one or two young men near his own age, but he kept so far aloof from them that they had long since ceased to seek him out. He kept away from Doctor Brinkerhoff, fearing talk of Iris, or some new complication, and even the postmaster's kindly sallies fell upon deaf ears. He, too, missed Iris, and often inquired for her, though he could not have failed to note that no letters came for Lynn.

Almost in the first of the hurt, when it seemed the hardest to bear, he had wondered whether it could be any worse if Iris were dead. All at once, he knew that it would be; that the cold hand and the quiet heart were the supreme anguish of loving, because there was no longer any possibility of change. Swiftly, he understood how Iris had felt when Aunt Peace died and he stood by, indifferent and unmoved.

In tardy atonement, he covered the grave in the churchyard with flowers — the goldenrod and purple aster that marched side by side over the hills to meet the frost, gay and fearless to the last.

He saw himself as he had been then, and his heart grew hot with shame. "I don't

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wonder she called me a clod," he said to himself, "for that is what I was."

In the maze of darkness through which he somehow lived, there was but one ray of comfort—the Master. Lynn felt, vaguely, that here was something upon which he might lean. He did not perceive that it was his own individuality which Herr Kaufmann had in some way awakened, so prone are we to confuse the person with the thing, the thought with the deed.

Day after day, he tramped over the hills around East Lancaster ; day by day, footsore and weary, he sought for peace along those sunlit fields. At night, desperately tired and faint with hunger, he crept home, where he slept uneasily, waking always with that hand of terror clutching at his heart.

He went most frequently to the pile of rocks in the woods, a mile or more from the house. There were no signs upon the bare earth around it ; seemingly no one went there but Lynn. Yet the suggestion of an altar was openly made, from the wide ledge at the foundation, where one might kneel, to the cross at the summit, rude, stern, and forbidding, chiselled in the rock.

Here, many times, Lynn had found comfort. Someone else, whose heart swelled, burned, and tried to escape, had cut that cross upon the granite. Thus he came, by slow degrees, into an intimate, invisible companionship.

Herr Kaufmann had ceased to speak of lessons, though Lynn went there sometimes and sat by while he worked. The Master had admitted him to that high fellowship which does not demand speech. For an hour or more, Lynn might sit there, watching, and yet no word would be spoken. As with Dr. Brinkerhoff, there were occasional visits in which nothing was said but "Good afternoon" and "Good-bye."

Fräulein Fredrika was always busy overhead with her manifold household tasks, and seldom disturbed them by coming into the shop. Lynn wondered if the house was never clean, and once put the question to Herr Kaufmann.

"Mine house is always clean," he answered, "except down here. Twice in every year, I allow Fredrika to come in mine shop with her cloths and her brush and her pails. The rest of the time, it is mine own. If she could clean here all the time, as up-

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stairs, I think she would be more happy. If you like to come in mine shop when I am not here, I am willing. It is one quiet place where one can rest undisturbed and think of many things. Fredrika would not care."

Weeks later, Lynn thought of the kindly offer. A storm was coming up, and he remembered that the Master had spoken of driving to another town with Dr. Brinkerhoff. "I have one violin," he had explained, "which was ordered long ago and which is now finished. While the Herr Doctor visits the sick, I will go on with mine instrument and perhaps obtain one more pupil."

Fräulein Fredrika answered his ring, and he asked, conventionally, for Herr Kaufmann. "Mine brudder is not home," she said. "He will have gone away, but I think not for long. You will perhaps come in and wait?"

"I will not disturb you," replied Lynn. "I will go down in the shop."

"But no," returned the Fräulein, coaxingly. "Will you not stay with me? I am with the loneliness when mine brudder is away. You will sit with me? Yes? It will be most kind!"

Thus entreated, he could not refuse, and he sat down in the parlour, awkward and ill

at ease. His hostess at once proceeded to entertain him.

"You think it will rain, yes?" she asked.

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, I do not," returned the Fräulein, smiling. "I always think the best. Let us wait and see which is right."

"We need rain," objected Lynn, turning uneasily in his chair.

"But not when mine brudder is out. He and the Herr Doctor will have gone for a long drive. Mine brudder have finished one fine violin and the Herr Doctor will visit the sick. Mine brudder's friend possesses great skill."

Lynn looked moodily past her and out of the window. The Fräulein changed her tactics. "You have not seen mine new clothes-brush," she suggested.

"No, returned Lynn, unthinkingly, "I have n't."

"Then I will get him."

She came back, presently, and put it into Lynn's hand. It was made of three strands of heavy rope, braided, looped to form a handle, tied with a blue ribbon, and ravelled at the ends. "See," she said, "is it not most beautiful?"

"Yes," agreed Lynn, absently.

"Miss Iris have told me how to make him."

Lynn came to himself with a start. "And this," she went on, pointing to the gilded potato-masher that hung under the swinging lamp, "and this,—but no, it is you who have made this for me. Miss Iris showed you how." She pointed to the butterfly made so long ago, but still in its pristine glory.

He said nothing, but by his face Fräulein Fredrika saw that she had made a mistake—that she had somehow been clumsy. After all, it was very difficult, this conversing with gentlemen. Franz was easy to get along with, but the others? She shook her head in despair, and immediately relinquished the thought of entertaining Lynn.

She could not tell him that she had changed her mind, that she no longer wanted him to sit with her, and that he could go down in the shop to wait for Herr Kaufmann. Painfully, in the silence, she considered several expedients, and at last her face brightened.

"Now that you are here," she said, "to guard mine house, it will be of a possibility for me to go out for some vegetables for mine

brudder's dinner. He will have been very hungry from his long ride, and you see it is not going to rain. You will excuse me for a short time, yes?"

"Gladly," answered Lynn, with sincerity.

"Then I need not fear to go. It will be most kind."

She had been gone but a few minutes when the storm broke. Lynn saw the wild rain sweep across the valley with a sense of peaceful security which was quite new to him. For some time, now, he would be alone—alone, and yet sheltered from the storm.

Very often, after a deep experience, one looks upon the inanimate things which were present at the beginning of it with wondering curiosity. The crazy jug, the purple tidy embroidered with pink roses, and the gilded potato-masher which swung back and forth when the wind shook the house, were strangely linked with Destiny.

Here he had thoughtlessly touched the Cremona, and, for the time being, made an enemy of the Fräulein. Her dislike of him abated only when he and Iris made her the hideous paper butterfly which illuminated a corner. A flash of memory took him back to

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the day they made it, alone, in the big dining-room. He saw the sweet seriousness in the girl's face as she glued on the antennæ, having chosen proper bits of an old ostrich feather for the purpose.

And now, the dining-room was empty, save of the haunting shadows. Aunt Peace was at rest in the churchyard, the fever at an end, and Iris — Iris had gone, leaving desolation in her wake.

Only the butterfly remained — the flimsy, fragile thing that any passing wind might easily have destroyed. The finer things of the spirit, that are supposed to be permanent, had vanished. In their place, there was only a heartache, which waxed greater as the days went by, and through the long nights which brought no surcease of pain.

In the beginning, Lynn had felt himself absolutely alone. Now he began to perceive that he had been taken into an invisible brotherhood. He was like one in a crowded playhouse when the lights go out, isolated to all intents and purposes, and yet conscious that others are near him, sharing his emotions.

The thunders boomed across the valley and

the lightnings rived the clouds. The grey rain swirled against the windows and the house swayed in the wind. Then, almost as suddenly as it had begun, the storm ceased, and Lynn smiled.

Diamonds dripped from every twig, and the grass was full of them. The laughter of happy children came to his ears, and a rainbow of living light spanned the valley. Its floating draperies overhung the topmost branches of the trees on the crest of the opposite hill, and picked out here and there a jewel — a ruby, an opal, or an emerald, set in the silvered framework of the leaves.

Lynn sighed heavily, for the beauty of it sent the old, remorseless pain to surging through his heart. The Master's violin lay on the piano near him, and he took it up, noting only that it was not the Cremona.

As his fingers touched the strings, there came a sense of familiarity with the instrument, as one who meets a friend after a long separation. He tightened the strings, picked up the bow, and began to play.

It was the adagio movement of the concerto — the one which Herr Kaufmann had said was full of heartache and tears. In all the

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literature of music, there was nothing so well suited to his mood.

He stood with his face to the window, his eyes still fixed upon the rainbow, and deep, quivering tones came from the violin. In an instant, Lynn recognised his mastery. He was playing as the great had played before him, with passion and with infinite pain.

All the beauty of the world was a part of it — the sun, the wide fields of clover, and the Summer rain. Moonlight and the sound of many waters, the unutterable midnights of the universe, Iris and the beauty of the marshes, where her name-flower, like a thread of purple, embroidered a royal tapestry. Beyond this still was the beauty of the spirit, which believes all things, suffers all things, and triumphs at last through its suffering and its belief.

Primal forces spoke through the adagio, swelling into splendid chords — love and night and death. It was the cry of a soul in bondage, straining to be free; struggling to break the chain and take its place, by right of its knowledge and its compassion, with those who have learned to live.

Lynn was quivering like an aspen in a storm, and he breathed heavily. Through the majestic crescendo came that deathless message: "Endure, and thou shalt triumph; wait, and thou shalt see." Like an undercurrent, too, was the inseparable mystery of pain.

Under the spell of the music, he saw it all — the wide working of the law which takes no account of the finite because it deals with the infinite; which takes no heed of the individual because it guards us all. Far removed from its personal significance, his grief became his friend — the keynote, the password, the countersign admitting him to that vast Valhalla where the shining souls of the immortals, outgrowing defeat, have put on the garments of Victory.

Sunset took the rainbow and made it into flame. Once more Lynn played the adagio, instinct with its world-old story, voicing its world-old law. He was so keenly alive that the strings cut into his fingers, yet he played on, fully comprehending, fully believing, through the splendid chords of the crescendo to the end.

Then there was a faltering step upon the stair, a fumbling at the latch, and someone

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staggered into the room. It was the Master, blind with tears, his loved Cremona in his outstretched hands.

"Here!" he cried, brokenly. "Son of mine heart! Play!"

XIX

The Secret Chamber

"HE loves her still." The memory of the words carried balm to Margaret's sore heart. There could be no mistake, for Doctor Brinkerhoff had been positive. It was absolutely, beautifully true. Believing all the time that he had forgotten, she was now proved false.

Swiftly upon the thought came another which sent the blood to her face. In all the time she had been in East Lancaster, she had feared that he might in some way learn of her presence, and now there was nothing she desired so much. Had Aunt Peace lived, she would scarcely have dared to continue the acquaintance, for, like Doctor Brinkerhoff, the Master was without "social position."

Iris, too, had gone — no one need know but Lynn. Herr Kaufmann did not know the name of the man she had married, and he

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thought Lynn's mother a stranger. It would be very simple to write the Master a note, saying that he had been so good to Lynn and had done so much for him that his mother would like to express her appreciation personally, and end by asking him to call.

But would the old promise still keep him away? As though it were yesterday, Margaret remembered her mother as she sternly demanded from Franz his promise never to enter the house again — and Franz was one who always kept his word.

Then she reflected that on the day when Aunt Peace received guests for the last time, he had been there, in that very house, with the Cremona, which had separated them in the beginning and, years later, so strangely brought them together.

Doctor Brinkerhoff had asked permission to bring his friend, and it would be so simple to give it. So easy to say: "Doctor, it would give me pleasure to meet your friend, Herr Kaufmann. Will you not bring him with you next Wednesday evening?" But, after all the years, all the sorrow that lay between them, would she wish Doctor Brinkerhoff to be there? Was it not also taking an unfair

advantage of the Master, to send for him, and then suddenly confront him with his sweetheart of long ago? Margaret put the plan aside without further thought.

And Lynn—would she wish Lynn to bring Herr Kaufmann? Would she want her son to tell him that she was the woman he had loved in vain a quarter of a century ago? Margaret flushed crimson as she imagined the meeting. Lynn did not know that it was the Master—only that she had cared for someone whom she did not marry. Would she wish Lynn to stand by, surprised and perhaps troubled? Her heart answered no.

The note, too, would be an unfair advantage. He would not know "Margaret Irving," and she could not well write that they had once loved each other. After all, she had only Doctor Brinkerhoff's word for it, and he might be mistaken. Even the Master might be labouring under a delusion—might only think he cared.

The after-meetings are often pathetic, between those who have loved in youth. Circumstance parts two who vow undying devotion, and one, perhaps, remains faithful, while the other forgets. Sometimes, both

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marry elsewhere, each with the other's image securely hidden in those secret chambers of the heart, which twilight and music serve best to open.

Time, that kindly magician, softens the harsh outlines, eliminates every defect, and, by his wondrous alchemy, transmutes the real to the ideal. Thus in one's inmost soul is enshrined the old love, with countless other precious things.

Rue lies at the threshold, for Regret, like a sentinel, guards the door, and to enter, one must first make peace with Regret. The labyrinthine passages are hung with shining fabrics, woven of long-dead dreams. The floor is deeply hidden with rosemary, that homely, fragrant herb which means remembrance. The light is that of a stained-glass window, where the sun streams through many colours, and illumines the utmost recesses with a rainbow gleam.

Costly vessels are there, holding Heart's Desire, which must wait for its fulfilment until immortal dawn. Heart's Belief is in a chest, laid away with lavender, but the lock is rusty and does not readily yield. Heart's Love, sweet with spikenard, waits near the

door, so eager to pass the threshold, where stands Regret!

Memory's jewels are there, in many a casket of cunning workmanship, where the dust never lies. Emeralds made of the "green pastures and the still waters"; sapphires that were born of sun and sea. Topazes of the golden glow that comes after a rain; diamonds of the white light of noon. Rubies that have stolen their colour from the warm blood of the heart, gladly giving its deepest love. Amethysts made of dead violets, still hinting that perishable fragrance which, perhaps, like a single precious drop, still lives within, forever out of the reach of decay. Opals made from changeful flame, of irised fancies that lived but for the space of a thought, then passed away. Linked together by a thousand perfect moments, these jewels of Memory wait for the quiet hour when one's fingers lift them from their hiding-place, and one's eyes, forgetting tears, shine with the old joy.

The petals of crimson roses, long since crushed and dead, rustle softly from the shadow when the door of the secret chamber opens. Melodies start from the silence and breathe the haunting measures of some lost

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song. Letters, ragged and worn, with the tint of old ivory upon their eloquent pages, whisper still: "I love you," though the hand that penned the tender message has long since been folded, with its mate, upon the quiet heart.

When the world has proved forbidding, when love has been unresponsive, and friendship has failed, one steals to the secret chamber with a sense of sanctuary. Past Regret, stern, unyielding, and austere, one goes silently, having given the password, and enters in.

The fragrant herbs and the rose petals bring balm to the tired heart, that heart which has loved so vainly, has tried so faithfully, and failed. The ghosts of dreams, woven in the tapestries that hide the walls, come back to touch the roughened fingers of the one who followed out the Pattern, in the midst of blinding tears. All the music that has soothed and comforted, trembles once more from muted strings. The work-worn hands, made old and hard by unselfish toil, become fair and smooth at a lover's kiss of long ago. After an hour in the secret chamber, when Mnemosyne, singing, brings forth her treas-

ures, one goes back, serene and fearless, to meet whatever may come.

Margaret came from her secret chamber with a smile upon her lips. In that one hour, she had finally parted with all bitterness, all sense of loss. After twenty-five years of heart hunger and disappointment, she had put it all aside, and come into her heritage of content.

She began to consider Herr Kaufmann again. After all, what was there to be gained? She might be disappointed in him, or he might be disillusioned in regard to her. She remembered what a friend had once told her, years ago.

"My dear," she had said, "there is one thing in my life for which I have never ceased to be thankful. When I was very young, I fell in love with a boy of my own age, and our parents, by separating us, kept us from making a hasty marriage. I did not forget, but later I met a man who was much better suited to me in every way, whom I liked and thoroughly respected, and of whom my mother approved. But, secretly, I cherished this old love until one day a lucky chance

brought me face to face with him. In an instant, the whole thing was gone, and I laughed at my folly—laughed because I was free. I married the other, and I have been a very happy wife—far happier than I should have been had I continued to believe myself in love with a memory."

There was truth in it, Margaret reflected. She went over to her mirror and sat down before it, to study her face. She was forty-five, and the bloom of youth was gone. The grey threads at her temples and around her low brow softened her face, where Time had left the prints of his passing. Her eyes, that had once been merry, were sad now, and the corners of her mouth drooped a little. She turned away from the mirror with a sigh, wondering if, after all, the dreams were not the best.

Moreover, the womanly instinct asserted itself. To be sought and never to do the seeking, to hold one's self high and apart, to be earned but never given—this feeling, so long in abeyance, returned to its rightful place.

When the years bring wisdom, one learns to leave many problems to their own working

out. Margaret determined not to interfere with the complex undercurrents which, like subterranean rivers, lie beneath our daily living. It might happen or it might not, but she would not seek to control the subtle forces which forever work secretly toward the fulfilling of the law. To live on from day to day, making the best of it,—this is a simple creed, but no one yet has found it unsatisfactory.

Lynn came in and went straight to his room. Margaret heard him walking back and forth, as if in search of something. He tuned his violin and she rejoiced, because at last he had turned to his practise.

But it was not practising that she heard. It was the concerto, every measure of which she knew by heart. With the first notes, she felt a new authority, a new grasp, and began to wonder if it were really Lynn. She leaned forward, her body tense, to listen.

When he came to the adagio, the hot tears blinded her. Lynn, her boy, to play like this! Her mother's heart beat high in an ecstasy of gratitude for the full payment, the granting of her heart's desire.

The deep tones stirred her very soul. The passion of it made her tremble, the beauty of

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it made her afraid. Wondering, she saw the working out of it,—that at the very hour when she had surrendered, had given up, had cast aside her bitterness forever, Lynn had come into his own.

With splendid dignity, with exquisite phrasing, with masterful interpretation, the concerto moved to its end. It left her faint, her heart wildly beating. Through Lynn, Franz had worked out her salvation, her atonement; through Lynn full payment had been made.

When he came out of his room, she was in the hall, her face alight with her great happiness. "Lynn!" she cried. A world of meaning was in the name.

"I know," he returned, but all the youth was gone out of his voice. At once she realised that he had crossed the dividing line, that, even to her, he was no longer a child, but a man.

He went past her, walked downstairs slowly, and went out. "Poor lad!" she murmured; "poor soul!" Lynn, too, had paid the price—was it needful that both should pay?

But, none the less, the fact remained; the boon had been granted and full payment

made, in each instance the same payment. She had paid with long years of heart-hunger, which only now had ceased. Lynn's years still lay before him.

A sob choked her. Was not the price too high? Must he bear what she had borne for these five and twenty years? With all the passion of her motherhood, she yearned to shield him; to eke out, in the remainder of her days, the remorseless balance against Lynn.

But in the working of that law there is no discrimination—the price is fixed and unalterable, the payment merciless and sure. There is no escape for the individual; it is continually the sacrifice of the one for the many, the part for the whole.

Try as she would, Margaret could not go back. She could not, for Lynn's sake, take up the burden she had laid down, in the futile effort to bear more. From her, no more would be accepted, so much was plain. The rest must come from Lynn.

Her heart ached for him, but there was nothing she could do, except to stand aside and watch, while his broad shoulders grew accustomed to their load. A wild impulse seized her to go to the city, find Iris, bring

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her back, even unwillingly, and literally force her to marry Lynn. But that was not what Lynn wanted, and Margaret herself had been forced into a marriage. Clearly, at last, she saw that she must remain passive, and cultivate resignation.

The hours went by and Lynn did not return. She well knew the mood in which he had gone away. At night, white-faced and weary, with his eyes gleaming strangely, he would come back, refuse to eat, and lock himself into his room. It had been so for a long time and it would be so until, through the slow working of the inner forces, he stepped over the boundary that his mother had just crossed.

White noon ascended the arch of the heavens, blazed a moment at the zenith, and then went on. The golden hours followed, each one making the shadows a little longer, the earth more radiant, if that could be.

Upon the hills were set the blood-red seals of the frost. Every maple, robed in glory, had taken on the garments of royalty. The air shimmered with the amethystine haze of Indian Summer, that veil of luminous mist, vibrant with colour, which Autumn weaves on her loom.

Margaret went out, leaving the door ajar for Lynn. There were few keys in East Lancaster. A locked door was discourteous—a reflection upon the integrity of one's neighbours.

From the elms the yellow leaves were dropping, like telegrams from the high places, saying that Summer had gone. She turned at the corner and went east, the long light throwing her shadow well before her. "It is like Life," she mused, smiling; "we go through it, following shadows — things that vanish when there is a shifting of the light."

Across the clover fields, where the dried blossoms stirred in their sleep as she passed, through the upland pastures, stony and barren, with the pools overgrown, through a fallow field, shorn of its harvest, where only the tiny lace-makers spread their webs amidst the stubble, Margaret's way was all familiar, and yet sadly changed.

A meadow-lark, the last one of his kind, winged a leisurely way southward, singing as he flew. A squirrel flaunted his bushy tail, gave her a daring backward glance, and scurried up a tree. She laughed, and paused at the entrance to the forest.

Once she had stood there, thrilled to her

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inmost soul. Again she had waited there, white to the lips with pain. Now she had outgrown it, had learned peace, and the long years slipped away, each with its own burden.

The wood was exquisitely still. A nut dropped now and then, and a belated bird called to its mate. The swift patter of fairy feet echoed and re-echoed through the long aisles. The air was crystalline, yet full of colour, and the gold and crimson leaves floated idly back and forth. It needed only a passing wind, at the right moment and from the right place, to make a rainbow then and there.

She went farther into the wood, with a sense of friendliness for the well-known way. Just at the turn of the path, she stopped, amazed. At their trysting-place, where the wide rock was laid at the foot of the oak, someone had reared an altar and blazoned a cross upon the stone.

Her eyes filled, for she knew who had made it, that symbol of sacrifice. Weather-worn and moss-grown, it must have stood for the whole of the five and twenty years. There was no word, no inscription — only the cross, but for her it was enough.

"To kiss the cross, Sweetheart, to kiss the

cross!" The last measures of the song reverberated through her memory, as Iris had sung it in her deep contralto, so long ago.

Sobbing, she knelt, with her lips against the symbol, then suddenly started to her feet, for there was a step upon the path.

For a blinding instant, they faced each other, unbelieving, then the Master opened his arms.

"Beloved," he breathed, "is it thou?"

XX

"Mine Brudder's Friend"

"Mine Brudder's Friend"

THAT day the Master put aside the garment of his years. The quarter century that had lain between them like a thorny, upward path was suddenly blotted out, and only the memory of it remained. Belated, but none the less keen, the primeval joy came back to him. Youth and love, the bounding pulse and the singing heart,—they were all his.

It was twilight when they came away from the moss-grown altar in the forest, his arm around his sweetheart, and the faces of both wet with happy tears.

"Until to-morrow, mine Liebchen," he said. "How shall I now wait for that to-morrow when we part no more? The dear God knew. He gave to me the cutting and the long night that in the end I might deserve thee. He was making of me an instrument suited to thy little hand." He kissed the hand

as he spoke, and Margaret's eyes filled once more.

Through the mist of her tears she saw the rising moon rocking idly just above the horizon. "See," said the Master, "it is a new light from the east, from the same place as thou hast come to me. Many a time have I watched it, thinking that it also shone on thee; that perhaps thy eyes, as well as mine, were upon it, and thus, through heaven, we were united."

"Those whom God hath joined together," murmured Margaret, "let no man put asunder."

"Those whom God hath joined," returned the Master, reverently, "no man can put asunder. Dost thou not see? I thought thou hadst forgotten, and when I go to keep mine tryst with Grief, I find thee there, with thy lips upon the cross."

"I have never gone before," whispered Margaret. "I could not."

"So? Mine Beloved, I have gone there many times. When mine sorrow has filled mine old heart to breaking, I have gone there, that I might look upon thy cross and mine and so gain strength. It is where we parted,

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where thy lips were last on mine. Sometimes I have gone with mine Cremona and played until mine sore heart was at peace. And to-day, I find thee there! The dear Father has been most kind."

"Did you know me?" asked Margaret, shyly. "Have I not grown old?"

"Mine Liebchen, thou canst never grow old. Thou hast the beauty of immortal youth. As I saw thee to-day, so have I seen thee in mine dream. Sometimes I have felt that thou hadst taken up thy passing, and I have hungered for mine, for it was a certainty in mine heart that the dear Father would give thee back to me in heaven.

"I do not think of heaven as the glittering place with the streets of gold and the walls of pearl, but more like one quiet wood, where the grass is green and the little brook sings all day. I have thought of heaven as the place where those who love shall be together, free from all misunderstanding or the thought of parting.

"The great ones say that man's own need gives him his conception of the dear God; that if he needs the avenging angel, so is God to him; that if he needs but the friend, that

will God be. And so, in mine dream of heaven, because it was mine need, I have thought of it but as one sunny field, where there was clover in the long grass and tall trees at one side, with the clear, shining waters beyond, where we might quench our thirst, and thee beside me forever, with thy little hand in mine. And now, because I have paid mine price, I do not have to wait until I am dead for mine heaven; the dear God gives it to me here."

"Whatever heaven may be," said Margaret, thrilled to the utmost depths of her soul, "it can be no more than this."

"Nor different," answered the Master, drawing her closer. "I think it is like this, without the fear of parting."

"Parting!" repeated Margaret, with a rush of tears; "oh, do not speak of parting!"

"Mine Beloved," said the Master, and his voice was very tender, "there is nothing perfect here—there must always be parting. If it were not so, we should have no need of heaven. But to the end of the road thou and I will go together.

"See! In the beginning, we were upon separate paths, and, after so long a time,

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the ways met. For a little space we journeyed together, and because of it the sun was more bright, the flowers more sweet, the road more easy. Then comes the hard place and the ways divide. But though the leagues lie between us and we do not see, we go always at the same pace, and so, in a way, together. We learn the same things, we think the same things, we suffer the same things, because we were of those whom the dear God hath joined. Another walks beside thee and yet not with thee, because, through all the distance, thou art mine.

"And so we go until thy road is turned. Thou dost not know it is turned, because the circle is so great thou canst not see. Little dost thou dream thou art soon to meet again with thy old Franz. Through the thicket, meanwhile, I am going, and mine way is hard and set with brambles. It is only mine blind faith which helps me onward—that, and the vision in mine heart of thee, which never for a day, nor even for an hour, hath been absent.

"One day mine road turns too, and there art thou, mine Beloved, leading by the hand mine son."

Margaret was sobbing, her face hidden against his shoulder.

"Mine Liebchen, it is not for me to bear thy tears. Much can I endure, but not that. After the long waiting, I have thee close again, thou and mine son, the tall young fellow with the honest face and the laughing ways, who have made of himself one artist.

"The way lies long before us, but it is toward the west, and sunset hath already begun to come upon the clouds. But until the end we go together, thy little hand in mine.

"Some day, Beloved, when the ways part once more, and thou or I shall be called to follow the Grey Angel into the darkness, I think we shall not fear. Perhaps we shall be very weary, and the one will be glad because the other has come into the Great Rest. But, Beloved, thou knowest that if it is I who must follow the Grey Angel, and still leave thee on the dusty road alone, mine grave will be no division. Life hath not taught me not to love thee with all mine soul, and Death shall not. Life is the positive, and Death is the negation. Shall Death, then, do something more than Life can do? Oh, mine Liebchen, do not fear!"

"Mine Brudder's Friend"

The Autumn mists were rising and the stars gleamed faintly, like far-off points of pearl. At the bridge, they said good night, and Margaret went on home, wishing, even then, that she might bear the burden for Lynn.

The Master went up the hill with his blood singing in his veins. Fredrika thought him unusually abstracted, but strangely happy, and until long past midnight, he sat by the window, improvising upon the Cremona a theme of such passionate beauty that the heart within her trembled and was afraid.

That night Fredrika dreamed that someone had parted her from Franz, and when she woke, her pillow was wet with tears.

It was not until the next afternoon that he realised that he must tell her. After long puzzling over the problem, he went to Doctor Brinkerhoff's.

The Doctor was out, and did not return until almost sunset. When he came, the Master was sitting in the same uncomfortable chair that, with monumental patience, he had occupied for hours.

"Mine friend," said the Master, with solemn joy, "look in mine face and tell me what you see."

"What I see!" repeated the Doctor, mystified; "why, nothing but the same blundering old fellow that I have always seen."

The Master laughed happily. "So? And this blundering old fellow; has nothing come to him?"

"I can't imagine," said the Doctor, shaking his head. "I may be dense, but I fear you will have to tell me."

"So? Then listen! Long since, perhaps, you have known of mine sorrow. Of it I have never said much, because mine old heart was sore, and because mine friend could understand without words."

"Yes," replied the Doctor, eagerly, "I knew that the one you loved was taken away from you while you were both very young."

"Yes. Well, look in mine face once more and tell me what you see."

"You—you have n't found her!" gasped the Doctor, quite beside himself with surprise.

"Precisely," the Master assured him, with his face beaming.

The Doctor wrung his hand. "Franz, my old friend," he cried, "words cannot tell you how glad I am! Where—who is she?"

"Mine friend," returned the Master, "it is

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you who are one blundering old fellow. After taking to yourself the errand of telling her that I loved her still, you did not see fit to come back to me with the news that she also cared. Thereby much time has been wrongly spent."

The Doctor grew hot and cold by turns. "You don't mean—" he cried. "Not—not Mrs. Irving!"

"Who else?" asked the Master, serenely. "In all the world is she not the most lovely lady? Who that has seen her does not love her, and why not I?"

Doctor Brinkerhoff sank into a chair, very much excited.

"It is one astonishment also to me," the Master went on. "I cannot believe that the dear God has been so good, and I must always be pinching mineself to be sure that I do not sleep. It is most wonderful."

"It is, indeed," the Doctor returned.

"But see how it has happened. Only now can I understand. In the beginning, mine heart is very hurt, but out of mine hurt there comes the power to make mineself one great artist. It was mine Cremona that made the parting, because I am so foolish that I must go

in her house to look at it. It was mine Cremona that took her to me the last time, when she gave it to me. 'Franz,' she says, 'if you take this, you will not forget me, and it is mine to do with what I please.'

"So, when I have made mineself the great artist, I have played on mine Cremona to many thousands, and the tears have come from all. See, it is always mine Cremona. And because of this, she has heard of me afar off, and she has chosen to have mine son learn the violin from me, so that he also shall be one artist. Twice she have heard me and mine Cremona when we make the music together; once in the street outside mine house, and once when I played the *Ave Maria* in her house when the old lady was dead."

Doctor Brinkerhoff turned away, his muscles suddenly rigid, but the Master talked on, heedlessly.

"See, it is always mine Cremona, and the dear God has made us in the same way. He has made mine violin out of the pain, the cutting, and the long night, and also me, so that I shall be suited to touch it. It is so that I am to her as mine Cremona is to me—I am her instrument, and she can do with me what she will.

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"It is but the one string now that needs the tuning," went on the Master, deeply troubled. "I know not what to do with mine Fredrika."

"Fredrika!" repeated Doctor Brinkerhoff. He, too, had forgotten the faithful Fräulein.

"The bright colours are not for mine Liebchen," the Master continued.

"The bright colours," said the Doctor, by some curious trick of mind immediately upon the defensive, "why, I have always thought them very pretty."

A great light broke in upon the Master, and he could not be expected to perceive that it was only a will o' the wisp. "So," he cried, triumphantly, "you have loved mine sister! I have sometimes thought so, and now I know!"

The Doctor's face turned a dull red, his eyelids drooped, and he wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Ah, mine friend," said the Master, exultantly, "is it not most wonderful to see how we have played at the cross-purposes? All these years you have waited because you would not take mine sister away from me, you, mine kind, unselfish friend! So much

fun have you made of mine housekeeping before she came that you would not do me this wrong!

"And I—I could not send mine sister the money to take the long journey, and for many years keep her from her Germany and her friends, then after one night say to her: 'Fredrika, I have found mine old sweetheart and I no longer want you.'

"Mine Fredrika has never known of mine sorrow, and I cannot to-day give her the news. It is not for me to make mine sister's heart to ache as mine has ached all these years, nor could I give her the money to go back to her Germany because I no longer want her, when she has given it all up for me. It would be most unkind.

"But now, see what the dear God has done for us! When it is all worked out, and we come to the end, we see that you, also, share. I know, mine friend, I know what it has been for you, because I, too, have been through the deep waters, and now we come to the land together. It is most fitting, because we are friends.

"Moreover, you are to her as she is to you. She has not told me, but mine old eyes are

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sharp and I see. I tell you this to put the courage into your heart. If you make mine sister happy, it is all I shall ask. Go, now, to mine Fredrika, and tell her I will not be back until late this evening! Is it not most beautiful?"

Limp, helpless, and sorely shaken, but without the faintest idea of protesting, Doctor Brinkerhoff found himself started up the hill. The Master stood at the foot, waving his hat in boyish fashion and shouting messages of good-will. At last, when he dared to look back, the Doctor saw that the way was clear, and he sat down upon a boulder by the roadside to think.

He would be ungenerous, indeed, he thought, if he could not make some sacrifice for Franz and for Mrs. Irving. Unwillingly, he had come into possession of Fräulein Fredrika's closely guarded secret, and, as he repeatedly told himself, he was a man of honour. Moreover, he was not one of those restless spirits who forever question Life for its meaning. Clearly, there was no other way than the one which was plainly laid before him.

But a few more years remained to him, he

reflected, for he was twenty years older than the Master; still life was very strange. Disloyalty to the dead was impossible, for she never knew, and would have scorned him if she had known. The end of the tangled web was in his hands—for three people he could make it straight again.

The long shadows lay upon the hill and still he sat there, thinking. The children played about him and asked meaningless questions, for the first time finding their friend unresponsive.

Finally one, a little bolder than the rest, came closer to him. "The good Fräulein," whispered the child, "she is much troubled for the Master. Why is it that he comes not to his home?"

With a sigh and a smile, the Doctor went slowly up the hill to the Master's house, where Fräulein Fredrika was waiting anxiously. "Mine brudder!" she cried; "is he ill?"

"No, no, Fräulein," answered the Doctor, reassuringly, his heart made tender by her distress. "Shall not Franz sit in my office to await the infrequent patient while I take his place with his sister? You are glad to see me, are you not, Fräulein?"

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The tint of faded roses came into the Fräulein's face. "Mine brudder's friend," she said simply, "is always most welcome."

She excused herself after a few minutes and began to bustle about in the kitchen. Surely, thought the Doctor, it was pleasant to have a woman in one's house, to bring orderly comfort into one's daily living. The kettle sang cheerily and the Fräulein hummed a little song under her breath. In the twilight, the gay colours faded into a subdued harmony.

"It is all very pleasant," said the Doctor to himself, resolutely putting aside a memory of something quite different. Perhaps, as his simple friends said, the dear God knew.

After tea, the Fräulein drew her chair to the window and looked out, seemingly unconscious of his presence. "A rare woman," he told himself. "One who has the gift of silence."

In the dusk, her face was almost beautiful —all the hard lines softened and made tenderly wistful. The Doctor sighed and she turned uneasily.

"Mine brudder," she said, anxiously, "if something was wrong with him, you would tell me, yes?"

"Of course," laughed the Doctor. "Why are you so distressed? Is it so strange for me to be here?"

"No," she answered, in a low tone, "but you are mine brudder's friend."

"And yours also, Fredrika. Did you never think of that?" She trembled, but did not answer, and, leaning forward, the Doctor took her hand in his.

"Fredrika," he said, very gently, "you will perhaps think it is strange for me to talk in this way, but have you never thought of me as something more than a friend?"

The woman was silent and bitterly ashamed, wondering when and where she had betrayed herself.

"That is unfair," he continued, instantly perceiving. "I have thought of you in that way, more especially to-day." Even in the dusk, he could see the light in her eyes, and in his turn he, too, was shamed.

"Dear Fräulein Fredrika," he went on, "I have not much to offer, but all I have is yours. I am old, and the woman I loved died, never knowing that I loved her. If she had known, it would have made no difference. Perhaps you think it an empty gift, but it is my all.

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You, too, may have dreamed of something quite different, but in the end God knows best. Fredrika, will you come?"

The maidenly heart within her rioted madly in her breast, but she was used to self-repression. "I thank you," she said, with gentle dignity; "it is one compliment which is very high, but I cannot leave mine Franz. All the way from mine Germany I have come to mend, to cook, to wash, to sew, to scrub, to sweep, to take after him the many things which he forgets and leaves behind, even the most essential. What should he think of me if I should say: 'Franz, I will do this for you no more, but for someone else?' You will understand," she concluded, in a pathetic little voice which stirred him strangely, "because you are mine brudder's friend."

"Yes," replied the Doctor, "I am his friend, and so, do you think I would come without his permission? Dear Fräulein, Franz knows and is glad. That is why I left him. Almost the last words he said to me were these: 'If you make mine sister happy, it is all I ask.'"

"Franz!" she cried. "Mine dear, unselfish Franz! Always so good, so gentle! Did he say that!"

"Yes, he said that. Will you come, Fredrika? Shall we try to make each other happy?"

She was standing by the window now, with her hand upon her heart, and her face alight with more than earthly joy.

"Dear Fräulein," said the Doctor, rejoicing because it was in his power to give any human creature so much happiness, "will you come?"

Without waiting for an answer, he put his hand upon her shoulder and drew her toward him. Then the heavens opened for Fräulein Fredrika, and star-fire rained down upon her unbelieving soul.

XXI

The Cremona Speaks

THE grey autumnal rain beat heavily upon her window, and Iris stood watching it, with a heavy weight upon her heart.

The prospect was inexpressibly dreary. As far as she could see, there was nothing but a desert of roofs. "Roofs," thought Iris, "always roofs! Who would think there were so many in the world!"

Six months ago she had been a happy child, but now all was changed. Grown to womanhood through sorrow, she could never be the same again, even though Aunt Peace, by some miracle of resurrection, should be given back to her.

In those long weeks of loneliness, Iris had learned a different point of view. She had not written to Mrs. Irving but once, though the motherly letter that came in reply to her note had seemed like a brief glimpse of East

Lancaster. Doctor Brinkerhoff's letter also remained unanswered, chiefly because she could not trust herself to write.

Her grief for Aunt Peace was insensibly changed. The poignant sense of loss which belonged to the first few weeks had become something quite different. Gradually, she had learned acceptance, though not yet resignation.

With a wisdom far beyond her years, she had plunged into her work. The hours not devoted to lessons or practice were spent at her books. She had even planned out her days by a schedule in which every minute was accounted for — so much for study, so much for practise, so much for the daily walk.

She had no friends. Aside from the hard-faced proprietor of the boarding-house, she was upon speaking terms with no one except her teacher and one of the attendants at the library. It has been written that there is no loneliness like that of a great city, and in the experience of nearly every one it is at some time proved true.

She missed East Lancaster, with all its dear, familiar ways. The elm-bordered path, the maple at the gate, and every nook and corner

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of the garden constantly flitted before her like a mocking dream. She could not avoid contrasting the tiny chamber, which was now her only home, with the great rooms of the old house, where everything was always exquisitely clean. She even longed for the kitchen, with its shining saucepans and its tiled hearth.

To go back, if only for one night, to her own room — to make the little cakes for Doctor Brinkerhoff, and play her part in the pretty Wednesday evening comedy, while Aunt Peace sat by, graciously hospitable, and Lynn kept them all laughing — oh, if she only could!

But it is the sadness of life that there is never any going back. The Hour, with its opportunity, its own individual beauty, comes but once. The hand takes out of the crystal pool as much water as the tiny, curved cup of the palm will hold. The shining drops, each one perfect in itself and changing colour with the shifting of the light, fall through the fingers back into the pool, with a faint suggestion of music in the sound. The circle widens outward, and presently the water is still again. If one could go back, gather from the pool those same shining drops, made into jewels

by the light, which, at the moment, is also changing, one might go back to the Hour.

Steadfastly, Iris had hardened her heart against Lynn. He had dared to love her! Her cheeks crimsoned with shame at the thought, but still, when the days were dark, it had more than once been a certain comfort to know that someone cared, aside from Aunt Peace, asleep in the churchyard.

Lynn and Aunt Peace—they were the only ones who cared. Mrs. Irving had been friendly; Doctor Brinkerhoff and the Master had been kind; Fräulein Fredrika had always been glad when she went to see her: but these were like bits of Summer blown for an instant against the Winter of the world.

Iris saw clearly, from her new standpoint, that she had learned to love the writer of the letters. It was he upon whom her soul leaned. Then, in the midst of her grief, to find that her unknown lover was merely Lynn—a boy who chased her around the garden with grasshoppers and worms—it was too much.

Meditatively, Iris brushed the surface of her cheek, where Lynn had kissed her. She could feel it now—an awkward, boyish

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kiss. It was much the same as if Aunt Peace or Mrs. Irving had done it, and it was not at all what one read about in the books.

If it were not for Lynn, she could go back to East Lancaster. She might go, anyway, if she were sure she would not meet him, but where could she stay? Not with Mrs. Irving —that was certain, unless Lynn went away. But even then, sometimes he would come back—she could not always avoid him.

Her eyes filled when she thought of the Master, generously offering her two of his six tiny rooms. The parlour, with its hideous ornaments, seemed far preferable to the dingy room in the boarding-house, where the old square piano stood, thick with dust, and where Iris did her daily practising. But no, even there, she would meet Lynn. East Lancaster was forbidden to her—she could never go there again.

Women have a strange attachment for places, especially for those which, even for a little time, have been "home." To a man, home means merely a house, more or less comfortable according to circumstances, where he eats and sleeps—an easy-chair and a fire which await him at the close of the day.

The location of it matters not to him. Uproot him suddenly, transport him to a strange land, surround him with new household gods, give him an occupation, and he will rather enjoy the change. Never for an instant will he grieve. With assured comfort and congenial employment, he will be equally happy in New York or on the coast of South Africa. But the woman, ah, the daily tragedy of the woman in the strange place, and the long months before she becomes even reconciled to her new surroundings! After all, it is the home instinct and the mother instinct which make the foundations of civilisation.

So it was that Iris hungered for East Lancaster, quite apart from its people. Every rod of the ground was familiar to her, from the woods, far to the east, to the Master's house on the summit of the hill, at the very edge of West Lancaster, overlooking the valley, and toward the blue hills beyond.

The rain dripped drearily, and Iris sighed. She felt herself absolutely alone in the world, with neither friend nor kindred. There was only one belonging to her who was not dead—her father. No trace of him had been

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found, and his death had been taken for granted, but none the less Iris wondered if he might not still live, heart-broken and remorseful; if, perhaps, her skirts had not brushed against him in some crowded thoroughfare of the city. She hoped not, for even that seemed contamination.

It did not much matter that in her haste she had left the box containing the photographs and the papers in the attic. Aunt Peace's emerald, the fan, and the lace, which she had also forgotten, were rightfully hers, and yet they seemed to belong to the house—to Mrs. Irving and Lynn.

Swiftly upon her thought came a rap at her door. "A letter for you, Miss Temple."

Iris took it eagerly and closed the door again, consciously disappointed when she saw that it was from Mrs. Irving. Doctor Brinkerhoff's careless remark, to the effect that Lynn would write soon, had fallen upon fertile soil. First, Iris decided not to read the letter when it came—to return it unopened. Then, that it was not necessary to be rude, but she need not answer it. Next, a healthy human curiosity as to what Lynn might have to say to her, after all that had passed be-

tween them. Then she wondered whether Lynn's next letter would be anything like the three that she had put away in her trunk. Now, her hands were trembling, and her cheeks were very pale.

"My Dear Child," the letter began. "Not having heard from you for so long, I fear that you are ill, or in trouble. If anything is wrong, do not hesitate to tell us, for we are your friends, as always. Doctor Brinkerhoff, Herr Kaufmann, or I would be glad to do anything to make you happier, or more comfortable. I will come, if you say so, or either of the other two.

"We are all well and happy here, but we miss you. Won't you come back to us, if only for a little while? The old house is desolate without you, and it is your home as much as it is mine. You left the emerald and the other little keepsakes. Shall I send them to you, or will you come for them? In any event, please write me a line to tell me that all is well with you, or, if not, how I can help you.

"Very affectionately yours,

"MARGARET IRVING."

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And never a word about Lynn! Only that "all" were well and happy, which, of course, included Lynn, and went far to prove to Iris that she was right—that he had no heart.

It was different in the books. When a beloved woman went away, the hero's heart invariably broke, and here was Lynn, "well and happy." Iris put the letter aside with a gesture of disdain.

Yet the motherly tone of it had touched her more deeply than she knew, and accentuated her loneliness. Twice she tried to answer it, to tell Mrs. Irving that she, too, was well and happy, and ask her to send the emerald, the lace, and the fan. Twice she gave it up, for the page was sadly blotted with her tears.

Then she determined to write the next day, and ask also for the box of papers in the attic. Yet would she want Mrs. Irving to see the documents meant for her eyes alone, and that pathetic little mother in the tawdry stage trappings? Surely not! She did not question Margaret's sense of honour, but there were many boxes in the trunk in the attic, and she would have to open them one after another, until she was sure she had found the right one.

Sorely puzzled, desperately homesick, and very lonely, Iris sobbed herself to sleep. All night she dreamed of East Lancaster, where the sky came down close to the ground, instead of ending at an ugly line of roofs. The soft winds came through her window, sweet with clover and apple bloom. Doctor Brinkerhoff and the Master, Fräulein Fredrika, Aunt Peace, Mrs. Irving, and Lynn—always Lynn—moved in and out of the dream. When she woke, she felt her desolation more keenly than ever before.

At the door of Sleep a sentinel stands, an angel in grey garments. The crimson poppies crown her head and droop to her waist. The floor is strewn with them, and the silken petals, crushed by the feet of passing strangers, give out a strange perfume. To enter that door, you must pass Our Lady of Dreams.

Sometimes she smiles as you enter, and sometimes there is only a careless nod. Often her clear, serene eyes make no sign of recognition, and at other times she frowns. But, whatever be the temper of the Lady at the door, your dream waits for you inside.

The parcels are all alike, so it is useless to stop and choose, but you must take one.

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Frequently, when you open it, there is nothing there but peaceful slumber, cunningly arranged to look like a dream. Once in a thousand times it happens that you get the dream that is meant for you, because it all depends upon chance, and so many strangers nightly enter that door that it is impossible to arrange the parcels any differently.

When the night has passed, and you come back, it is always through the same door, where the patient sentinel still stands. You are supposed to give back your dream, so that someone else may have it the next night, but if she is tired, or very busy, you may sometimes slip through and so have a dream to remember.

Iris had given back her dream, but a strong impression of East Lancaster still remained, and it was as though she had been there in the night. Suddenly she sat up in bed, with her heart wildly throbbing. Why not go back?

Why not, indeed? Why not take a flying trip, just to see the dear place again? Why not talk for a few minutes with Mrs. Irving, then slip upstairs for the emerald, the bit of lace, the feather fan, and the lonely little mother in the attic?

She could plan her journey so that she would be making her call while Lynn was at his lesson. When it was time for him to return, she could go to Doctor Brinkerhoff's and thank him for writing. While there, she could see Lynn come downhill — of course, not to look at him, but just to know that he was out of the way. Then she could go up the hill and stay with Fräulein Fredrika and the Master until almost train time.

It was practicable and in every way desirable. Perhaps, after she had seen East Lancaster once more, she would not be so homesick. Iris hummed a little song as she dressed herself, far happier than she had been for many months.

Thought and action were never far apart with her. The next day she was safely aboard the train. She stopped overnight at the little hotel in a nearby town, where once she had been with Aunt Peace, after a memorable visit to the city. The morning train left at five, and just at ten she reached her destination, her heart fluttering joyously.

Lynn was certainly at his lesson — there could be no doubt of that. She fairly flew up the street, fearful lest someone should see her,

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and paused at the corner for a look at the old house.

Nothing was changed. It was just as it had been for two centuries and more. Panic seized her, but she went on boldly, though her cheeks burned. After all, she was not an intruder — it was her home, not only through the gift, but by right of possession.

She rang the bell timidly, but no one answered. Then she tried again, but with no better result, so she turned the knob and the door opened.

She stepped in, but no one was there. "Mrs. Irving!" she called, but only the echo of her own voice came back to her. The portraits in the hall stared at her, but it was a friendly scrutiny and not at all distressing. They seemed to nod to one another and to whisper from their gilded frames: "Iris has come back."

"Well," she thought, "I can't sit down and wait, for Lynn may come home from his lesson at any minute. I'll just go upstairs."

The door of Margaret's room was ajar, and Iris peeped in, but it was empty, like the rest of the house. She stole into Aunt Peace's

room, found her keepsakes, and prepared to depart.

She saw her reflection in the long mirror, and, for the moment, it startled her. "I feel like a thief," she said to herself, "even though I am only taking my own."

She went up into the attic, found the box, and came down again. The old house was so still! Surely it would do no harm if she took just one sniff at the cedar chest before she went away. She loved the fragrance of the wood, and it would delay her only a moment longer.

Then, all at once, she paused like a frightened bird. Someone was there! Someone was walking back and forth in Lynn's room! Scarcely knowing what she did, Iris crouched on the floor at the end of the chest, trusting to the kindly shadows to screen her if the door should open.

But no one came. Lynn had taken the Cremona from its case with something very like a smile upon his face. The brown breasts had the colour of old wine, and the shell was thin to the point of fragility.

He had feared to touch it, but the Master had only laughed at him. "What!" he had

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said, "shall I not sometimes lend mine Cremona to mine son, who like mineself is one great artist? Of a surety!"

Lynn placed the instrument in position, and dreamily, began to play. His mother was out, and he played as he could not if he had not thought himself alone. All his heartbreak, all his pain, the white nights and the dark days went into the adagio, the one thing suited to his mood.

At the first notes, Iris drew a quick, gasping breath. Surely it was not Lynn! Yet who else should be in his room, playing as no one played but the great?

Primeval forces held her in their grasp, and all at once her shallowness fell away from her, leaving her free. The blood surged into her heart with shame—she had wronged Lynn. She had been so blind, so painfully sure of herself, so pitifully important in her self-esteem!

The music went on without hindrance or pause. Deep chords and piercing flights of melody alternated through the theme, yet there was the undertone of love and night and death. Iris clenched her hands until the nails cut into her palms. All her life, she

seemed to have been playing with tinsel; now, when it was out of her reach, she had discovered the gold.

Why should it seem so strange for Lynn to play like this? Had he not written the letters? Had he not offered her his whole heart—the gift she had so insultingly thrown aside? Iris knelt beside the chest, in bitter humiliation.

One thing was certain—she must go away, and quickly. She could not wait there, trembling and afraid, until someone found her; she must get away, but how? She was sorely shaken, both in body and soul.

She could not go away, and yet she must. She would go to the station, and, from there, write to Mrs. Irving and to Lynn. The least she could do was to ask him to forgive her. Having done that, she would go back to the city, change her address, and be lost to them forever.

Low, quivering tones came from the Cremona, like the sobs of a woman whose heart was broken. Suddenly, Iris knew that she belonged to Lynn—that through love or hate she was bound to him forever. Then, in a blinding flood came the tears.

Slowly the adagio swept to its end, and yet

The Cremona Speaks

she could not move. The music ceased, and yet the silence held her spellbound, vainly praying for the strength to go away. She heard the click of the lock as the violin case was closed, the quick step to the door, and the turning of the knob.

She shrank back into the corner, close to the chest, and hid her face in her hands, then someone lifted her up.

"Sweetheart," cried Lynn, "have you come back to me?"

At the touch, at the tender word, the barriers crumbled away, and Iris lifted her lovely tear-stained face to his. "Yes," she said, unsteadily, "I have come back. Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" repeated Lynn, with a happy laugh; "why, dearest, there is nothing to forgive!"

In that radiant instant, he thought he spoke the truth, so quickly do we forget sorrow when the sun shines into the soul.

"Oh!" sobbed Iris, hiding her face against his shoulder, "I—I said you had no heart!"

"So I have n't, darling," answered Lynn, tenderly; "I gave it all to you, the very first day I saw you. Will you keep it for me,

dear? Will you give me a little corner of your own?"

"All," whispered Iris. "I think it has always been yours, but I didn't know until just now."

"How long have you been here, sweetheart?"

"I—I don't know. I heard you play, and then I knew."

"It was that blessed Cremona," said Lynn, with his lips against her hair. "You said I should never kiss you again, dear, do you remember? Don't you think it's time you changed your mind?"

The golden minutes slipped by, and still they stood there, by the window in the hall. Margaret came back, and went up to her room, but no one heard her, even though she was singing. At the head of the stairs, she stopped, startled. Then, by the light of her own happiness, she understood, and crept softly away.

THE END.

CAT. D. SLIP

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